

*Mama and her
Mitzvahs*

Stories and Reminiscences

Sophie Stransman

Copyright © 2001 by Sophie Stransman

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior written permission of the author.

Many of the designations used by manufacturers and sellers to distinguish their products are claimed as trademarks. Where those designations appear in this book and the author was aware of a trademark claim, the designations have been printed in initial capital letters.

Designed by First Folio Resource Group, Inc. Cover design by Alana Lai/First Folio Printed and bound in Canada by Quebecor

*Kindness is the sunshine
in which virtue grows.*

— *Anonymous*

ISBN 0-9730300-0-3

Contents

Norah's Ballgame	7	Partners in Business, Partners in Life	107
Cabbagetown	11	A Social Evening	112
Mama and her Mitzvahs	16	Franzl Parlmutter	118
Mama and the Lord's Day Act	20	Sophie and the 'Shochet'	121
The Slum Clearance Project	23	Aunt Esther's Vacation	123
Mama's Best Friend	27	An Evening Out	126
Paul Suede	30	Papa and the Telephone Operator	129
Cabbagetown's Pixillated Sisters	38	Mrs. Baldovich Takes a Tumble	134
Mama, Papa and Me	41	Mrs. Badgeley Buys a Dress	140
The Breadman, the Milkman and the Condiment Salesman	45	A Vagrant	145
The Honeymoon Suit	48	A Mother's Heartache	150
Mrs. Wiggins and Mrs. Maloney	56	Dinner Hour at the Baldoviches	154
The Good Husband	59	A Salesman	159
Harriet Harris	62	A Cousin from Germany	170
An Evening at Home	71	A Party for a Grandchild	193
Our Bookkeeping System	75	Two Brothers	206
Friendship	80	Mama and the Meaning of Life	209
Social Climbers	86	Spring Comes to Cabbagetown	216
Mama	92	A Suit and a Trip for Grandmother	222
Papa	99	Glossary	234
Sophie	103	Photographs	239

Norah's Ballgame

The question is: could you forget a girl who pitched a baseball game on her wedding day? No, did you say? Well, neither could I. That girl's name was Norah Maloney, and I barely knew her; yet I find her always with me. You see, Norah and her ballgame represent a certain era and the neighbourhood where I grew up. The era was the Great Depression of the Thirties. And as for the neighbourhood, let me introduce you to that. Cabbagetown, the poor working class district of east central Toronto. Cabbagetown before the real estate developers arrived, before it was a posh address and before it could boast an impressive list of celebrated and professional residents.

During World War II, while Toronto's Cabbagetown, being predominantly of British stock, contributed many soldiers to the war effort, at home there was unprecedented prosperity. The real estate market flourished, and the entrepreneurs, noting the value of its easy accessibility to the downtown area, moved in and changed the appearance of Cabbagetown into a desirable property. Indeed, with the passing years, there emerged from Cabbagetown some outstanding citizens—lawyers and businessmen, the champion swimmer George Young, the popular broadcaster Gordon Sinclair, and four doctor brothers who, from humble beginnings, founded first the Raxlen Clinic at Parliament and Dundas Streets, and finally, the Doctors' Hospital on Brunswick Avenue.

But these developments came later, in the future. In the period with which we are here concerned, Cabbagetown had the reputation of an Anglo-Saxon slum. In those far-off days, indeed, it had very little to recommend it. Unless you counted its unique community spirit. And Siegel's Groceteria, with its proprietors, my father and mother.

Papa, for all his solemnity, was known to be an honest and reliable merchant. And mama? Why, anybody out there could tell you that mama helped you live.

Mama saw nothing unusual in the fact that apart from being storekeeper, she “was a social director and, at times dietician, practical nurse, music or fashion consultant”, and on occasion even marriage counsellor with the mutual consent of both parties. The use of our telephone was another service that mama provided. By no means everyone in the neighbourhood had a telephone, and our ruling that anyone was welcome to use ours was often a convenience, and sometimes a *mitzvah*, a blessing. By and large, papa went along with mama’s policy, albeit grudgingly. He felt that the service should apply to our customers, and to no one else.

I was mama’s appointed ‘message girl,’ and festive occasions found me delivering a bottle of her homemade wine. Such an occasion was the marriage of Miss Norah Maloney to Mr. Ernest Dingle.

On Thursdays, when she did her shopping, Maude Maloney brought her daughter Norah with her. The lady of the house where Norah was employed would let her go early, and young Norah would board the bus and two streetcars that took her to Sumach Street. Then she would spend her day off with her parents and with the pleasant young man who was her fiance.

One particular Thursday morning, mama noticed that Norah was wearing her baseball uniform when the threesome entered the store. Maude herself was dressed in her everyday clothes—a housedress under her grey overcoat, and scuffed brown Oxfords. On the other hand, Norah’s fiance appeared conspicuous because he was wearing a dark suit, with a flower in his buttonhole. Mama made no comment. She simply proceeded to fill Mrs. Maloney’s relief order.

“I’ll take the raisins today,” Maude informed mama. “You can do a lot with raisins. I soak mine well and mix them with stale bread and grate in an apple, if I have one handy. And you’d be real surprised what a swell pudding I take out of my oven.”

Mama nodded. “I’m sure you’re a fine housekeeper, Mrs. Maloney.”

“Well, I try to be,” replied Maude, not without a flush of pride. “And you just watch my speed next month when my husband gets his first paycheck. Hot dog! I have a list of recipes as long as my arm that I’ve been saving all winter.”

“I’m so glad for you, Mrs. Maloney,” said mama.

“Oh, well,” reflected Maude, “I guess I really shouldn’t complain none. The stuff they give you on the pogy ain’t all that bad. It’s just the monotony of it, you know.”

“I understand,” said mama. “That’s what everybody complains of.” Mama gathered the order into two bags. Then she turned to Norah and the young man, who were standing quietly by, holding hands and smiling happily into each other’s eyes. “I understand that you children are to be married soon.”

It was Mrs. Maloney who answered. “They are married, Mrs. Siegel. They were married this morning.”

Wide-eyed, mama carefully surveyed Norah from the baseball cap on her head down to the orange and black striped stockings and ankle-high running shoes on her feet. “They were married this morning, you say?”

“That’s right! Today bein’ Norah’s day off, she and Ernie were married a little while ago, over at St. Giles.” Then Maude screwed up her face. “We don’t believe in making no big fuss, you know. Just the immediate families was there and that’s all. Besides, Norah had to rush right home and change.”

Mama lifted her eyebrows. “Oh, is that so?”

“Yes,” declared Maude. “Her team is having their first league game of the season this afternoon. In Hamilton!”

“In Hamilton?” mama spoke in her habitual quaint English. “Isn’t it rather cold to be going to Hamilton to play baseball?”

“Oh well, we all have to cooperate in this world” Maude mused. “The season is a bit early this year, but that’s the way the schedule was drawn up, and you have to go according to the schedule.”

“Oh yes, of course,” agreed mama. “You have to go according to the schedule.”

“And even though this is just a practice game,” Maude explained, “it’s very important — they get their positions today.”

“I see,” nodded mama, although, of course, she did not see at all. So far Norah had not uttered so much as a single word. But now, reluctantly turning her eyes from her husband, she looked straight at mama and spoke. “I have to pitch,” she said.

By the time she stood at the door holding it open for Mrs. Maloney and her party, mama had regained her self-composure. “Well, congratulations to all of you,” she said, smiling brightly. “And when my Sophie comes home from school, you could be expecting a little wedding present from us. A bottle of my homemade wine.”

Cabbagetown

Beginning in the 1840’s there began to arrive a stream of immigrants who, seeking a better life in the new country, left their homes in England, Ireland and Scotland and sailed to Canada. One can scarcely imagine the hardships endured on their voyage across the Atlantic. In any case, eventually many found their way to York (later Toronto), and settled in what became the east-central part of the city. To these poor folk, cabbages must have been an important staple, for no sooner had they found homes than they planted cabbages in their backyards. Thus giving the community its name. Cabbagetown has been delineated as that area of Toronto lying south from Gerrard Street to Queen and east from Parliament Street to the Don River. And here, right in the heart of these boundaries, stood our grocery store. The letters on the plate glass window read: ‘Siegel’s Groceteria. Fresh Fruits & Vegetables, Dry Goods, Hardware, also Crockery and Shoes.’

The store was narrow, with shelves built along the left-hand side to the ceiling and a counter about three feet in front of the shelves. On one end of this counter there was a glass showcase, cracked in two or three places, which contained tobaccos and cigarettes. One corner of it, peculiarly enough, was reserved for a rather bewildering array of household drugs—Sloan’s Liniment for aching muscles, Italian Balm to soothe chapped hands, mustard plasters for sore backs, Ovaltine for nursing mothers, Seidlitz powders for upset stomachs, Epsom Salts, Castor Oil and simple first aid needs like iodine and gauze bandages.

On the far end of the counter stood a battered grey metal cash register and a lopsided white scale.

The shelves, stuffed to capacity, sagged and groaned under the weight of the rows of canned goods, large and small; the profusion of packages, for the most part standing right side up but many with the printing upside down; the motley collection of bottles and jars, some squat, some tall, some narrow, some wide, but all the colours of the rainbow.

Three colourful posters were tacked to the shelves. The first, advertising tobacco, depicted two rosy-cheeked old men smoking long-stemmed pipes. The second featured a popular chocolate bar. It portrayed a buxom young woman, reclining languorously on a chaise-longue, with her wavy hair to her shoulders. And, finally, towards the very centre of all the shelves, in a position of prominence for all to see, a mammoth sign displayed a huge red bottle of ketchup inside a yellow circle. Underneath appeared the words 'Heinz 57 Varieties.'

To the right was the plate glass window, with space in back of it for displays of fresh fruits and vegetables. From a great steel hook in the ceiling there hung a large bunch of bright yellow bananas. Nearby on the floor stood several hemp sacks containing potatoes, onions, granulated sugar, hops; bushels of cabbages, apples, turnips, carrots; coarse paper bags of charcoal and briquettes; two large barrels which held malt and one small one with herring in oil.

In back of this section stood a short counter. It contained deep drawers to the floor, and had its top surface divided into three segments, one for hardware, one for crockery, and in the third, one amorphous heap of shoes. Against the back wall stood an outmoded wooden icebox. Beside it, a wall telephone. And at the entrance to the store, just above the door, was the bell.

The store itself was separated from the living quarters by five steps rising to a small square hall. Here there was a side entrance and a staircase leading to the upstairs. A flowery drape hung loosely between the hall and our kitchen. Here meals were prepared at mama's huge black coal stove, and eaten at the large

wooden table surrounded by numerous kitchen chairs. In one corner a sprawling, many-cracked and discoloured cabinet held a conglomeration of bulging shelves, drawers, cubbyholes and tilting bins. From the ceiling there dangled a single electric light bulb above the table. Two calendars hung from nails on the wall, one picturing a barefoot boy and his dog, and the other a ship on a choppy sea. Under the window, with its dark green shade, were the sink and draining board, and in the far corner mama's sewing machine, complete with foot pedal and straight-backed chair. The parlour portion comprised a well-grooved sofa, two horsehair chairs and a floor lamp with an orange coloured shade. In this room, family and friends congregated to visit, to celebrate and to mourn. Here mama sewed and I studied; and here all social activities were carried on.

Upstairs we had two bedrooms and a bathroom. We were especially proud of our bathroom. It contained a toilet given to loud gurglings and swooshings, which was operated by a chain; a wood-encased wash basin and our very own bathtub. We three didn't need the bathhouse on Sackville Street any more. Indeed, we were among the privileged few who had a bathtub for only one family. Not only that, in our basement there was a 'jacket heater,' which produced hot water at only an hour and a half's notice.

At the time of the installation of these twin luxuries, there was some little confusion. Before the tub could be fitted in, it was found necessary to remove the bathroom door. This presented no particular difficulty so far. It was after the tub was set in place that the difficulty arose. Because the door wouldn't close. However, the plumber (a local man) got around the problem. He simply carved a slot in the door large enough to accommodate the obstruction. After that, the door opened and shut easily against the bathtub, ledge and all. Besides, that slot often came in handy for passing things—sometimes in, sometimes out—like soap, wash-rags and other incidentals.

Mama usually had an answer for everything. For example...

“Mama...?”

“Yes, Sophie?”

“Mama, do you know what I dreamed last night?”

“How should I know what you dreamed last night?”

“I dreamed,” said I in a wistful voice, “that I went to my cupboard, and it was all filled with beautiful clothes. And I said to my self, “Now let me see what shall I wear today?”

I remember how softly mama’s eyes kindled as she answered.

“And a chicken, my dear child, dreams of chicken feed.”

Little Arala Baldovich was only five years old, but sometimes he had an answer for mama.

“Mrs. Siegel?”

“Yes, Arala, what could Mrs. Siegel do for you today?”

“Beh!” snorted Arala’s mother, Mrs. Baldovich.

“Mrs. Siegel, can you buy things without money?”

Mama took time to reflect upon the question. Then very gently she replied, “Not usually, Arala.” But noting a frown on the child’s forehead, she added quickly, “but you don’t need to worry about it. Here’s a nice cookie for you. And that’s free.”

“Mrs. Siegel?”

“Yes, Arala?”

“Beh!” snorted Mrs. Baldovich.

“Meh!” grunted Mrs. Baldovich.

“Mrs. Siegel, sell me please a great big bag free cookies.”

“Beh! Meh!” groaned Mrs. Baldovich.

If mama didn’t have an answer, then she had an alternative. “Why, Phyllis, how beautiful you look, my dear.” The young woman standing before her was truly lovely.

Blonde, with a heart-shaped face, and pregnant for the fourth time, her eyes shone with a desperate happiness. Holding out her left hand, she proudly displayed the plain gold band on her fourth finger. “Oh, Mrs. Siegel, I didn’t know anyone could be so happy!” she exulted. “This is what I’ve always wanted—for Bob and me to be married!”

“Well, that’s just fine,” mama clucked approvingly.

“You know, Mrs. Siegel, Bob’s always been wonderful to me and the children. We’ve never lacked for anything.”

“That’s true,” mama hastened to agree. To be sure, Bob Gallagher provided well for his family. He had a fine steady job, employed by the City of Toronto as a garbage collector. And he was indeed the envy of many of his neighbours.

“The funny thing is, though,” observed the new bride, “that Bob never wanted any responsibility, and yet he holds down such a responsible job!”

Somewhat bewildered by this paradox herself, mama raised her eyebrows.

“I guess,” the young woman was saying now, “that there are some things about men we women will never understand.”

As she nodded her agreement, mama appeared rather confused. But then shrugging her shoulders, she brightened. For she knew just what to do. “I’ll tell you what to do, Mrs. Gallagher,” she said, placing special emphasis on her customer’s new name. “You know the way to my kitchen. Well, you go right in there and help yourself to a nice hot cup of coffee. You’ll find a pot full on my stove. Freshly brewed.”

Mama and her Mitzvahs

“Sophie, what’s a ‘mitzvah’?” Constance Seymour asked one day. Constance had eaten enough meals in our kitchen to understand several Yiddish words. She knew that *mazel* meant good luck, that *naches* was joy, *tzores* trouble. She was aware that *alzo* was the word for therefore, that a *schmorrer* was a penny-pincher, the opposite of a sport, and that our neighbour Mr. Crumm, who habitually staggered a zig-zag path home from the corner beer parlour, was a *shikkur*.

I had explained to Constance that much of ‘Yiddishana’ was lost in the translation. For example, that ‘tava’ of mama’s that papa was always referring to might literally mean habit, but it encompassed much more—a way with people, perhaps; a philosophy towards life; and papa’s ‘noo t’osta’—‘so now you have it’—implied ‘but how ridiculous can you be?’ Some of the expressions that Constance was curious about I couldn’t interpret for her at all. I don’t think anybody could really translate *tacka* or *nebech*, *kein-einborah*, or *mirtchem*, or *hack mir nicht kein chainak*. But *mitzvah*? I thought it over.

“Now let me see, Constance,” I said. “To do a *mitzvah* is to do something good for somebody. Yes, it’s a sort of a good deed. Well, really it means more than that, but... .”

“Never mind.” Constance smiled with a knowing look in her eyes. “I understand. It’s what your mother is always doing.”

To mama *mitzvah* was a way of life. The word *mitzvah* was always on the tip of her tongue. And her mitzvahs came in many forms. If a family needed a free Christmas basket, where did it apply? If mama didn’t know, she would find out. If a kitten

was lodged helplessly in a tree, to whom was it that a tearful child came for assistance? Mama would emerge armed with pole or broom to the rescue. And in cases of emergency, who was it that knew where to telephone. Mama directed the sick to the respective clinics of the hospitals, deserted children to the Children’s Aid Society, and when in doubt, there was always the Salvation Army.

Mama loved people and she derived a deep sense of satisfaction from helping them. Her path, however, was strewn with many obstacles. For generally speaking, papa made it crystal clear that he did not share her enthusiasm for mitzvahs. His argument ran that since to his recollection nobody had ever bothered to do any mitzvahs for them, they didn’t owe any either. But loudly as papa might protest, it usually did him little good. For when mama embarked upon a mitzvah, there was nothing anybody could do to stop her.

There was, for example, the matter of Borislov Szpadowski’s suit. Oh, how bitterly papa bickered with mama over that suit! But papa didn’t stand a chance, because mama had made her mind up to do a mitzvah.

“Pan Spiegel?” Her customer spoke with a Polish accent. He was a husky young man with a thick head of chestnut coloured hair, light brown eyes and blunt features. He wore the heavy blue overalls and rough tweed shirt of a working man, and in his hands he held a wire hanger on which hung a limp brown suit.

Mama greeted him with her customary cordiality. “*Dzien dobry*, Borislov. What can I do for you?”

Borislov Szpadowski was a single man, one of many in the district who rented furnished rooms. Mama knew that he had been without work now for some time.

"I got letter from my cousin Stanislaus yesterday," Borislov stated. "He is living in this place up north. Timmins. And he is working there in the mines. And making good money. Maybe if I come there, my cousin he would get me job too."

"But how will you get there, Borislov?" enquired mama, her voice tinged with anxiety. "Because I'm understanding that this mining town is hundreds of miles away from here. And with the weather still so cold..."

Borislov held up a thumb. "With this!" he smiled. "How else?"

"And how long will it taking you?"

"Oh, not much longer than one week, Pan," Borislov replied confidently. "Many men are doing it. In good weather we are sleeping in the parks, and sometimes if we are lucky, they are feeding us in the jails and letting us stay the night also."

"Well, I hope that your cousin finds you a good job," mama said, "and also that you will be strong enough to working hard."

"I will try my best, Pan," replied Borislov, now beginning to eye the suit in his hand, "but I have favour to ask you."

"Do you want I should take care of your suit, Borislov?" mama said promptly. "Of course! I'll be glad to doing that for you."

Standing at the door with the suit over one arm, mama held out both her hands to Borislov. With one she shook his hand warmly and with the other she bracingly patted his arm. "I wish you good luck and a safe trip, my friend," she said. And looking sincerely into his eyes, she reassured him: "And don't you worry nothing about your suit! Because I'm going to hanging it right in my closet, and I'll take the best care of it. Just like it belonged to my husband."

In the ensuing months, what a bone of contention that suit became! For the very sight of the shabby brown jacket and trousers hanging next to his good grey suit irritated papa like

a boil. "A squatter!" he sneered. "Like a stranger in our own bedroom!"

"What kind of a man are you, Elia Siegel," mama replied with scorn, "that it hurts yon to do such a little mitzvah?"

"Don't you understand?" papa protested. "I consider it an intrusion on our privacy!"

As time passed, papa continued to complain. Not once did he remove his grey suit from the cupboard that he didn't mention the other suit. "You haven't heard a word from him!" he fussed. "What are you saving it for?"

But straightening her shoulders, mama stood her ground.

"It's nearly two years since the miserable man went away," papa fumed. "Throw it out already!"

Mama remained unshaken.

"I don't understand what you took the *shmatoh* for in the first place!" papa sulked.

"Because it was a mitzvah!" mama asserted defiantly. "I told you before, Elia, I wanted to do a mitzvah!"

Truly, mama was a stubborn woman. For three years, spring and fall, she conscientiously aired the brown suit on her clothesline, brushed it carefully and returned it to the cupboard in the spot she had appropriated for it. Right beside papa's good grey suit. And there it remained.

But beyond a doubt, mama was to reap her reward. For to be sure, the day arrived when a vagrant with abundant chestnut coloured hair appeared at the door. Mama recognized him even before he entered. Bone-thin and in tatters. Nor was she unaware of the tears in the light brown eyes that he turned to her with their mute question. And sighing from the depth of her being, mama nodded her head several times. "Yes, Borislov," she said. "It wasn't easy, but I still have it."

Mama and the Lord's Day Act

Never shall I forget the day that mama and papa were charged with an infraction of the Lord's Day Act. I remember the good-looking young policeman entering our kitchen and busily writing in his book. Two deep lines had formed between his eyebrows, and when he spoke he sounded very apologetic. "You know how I hate to do this, Mrs. Siegel, but I caught you red-handed. What you have done constitutes a breach of the Lord's Day Act, and I'll have to fine you five dollars."

Papa was exceedingly aggravated. He stood leaning against the kitchen sink, sullenly fingering his watch. Nervously pulling it from his vest pocket, opening it, turning glowering grey eyes to glance upon the photograph of mama as a young woman within; then somewhat mollified, snapping it shut again and returning it to his pocket. It was papa's firm conviction, stated over and over again, that they should abide by the law one hundred percent and remain closed on Sunday. Remain closed and refuse to answer the side door at all! In this, mama agreed with papa. But only in theory, for she could never ignore a real need. On Sunday or any other day.

And now, with her dark eyes curious, mama observed the policeman's every move as he wrote, tore off a copy and handed it to her. Then with a single nod acknowledging the slip of paper in her hand, she raised her eyes to him, "Sit down, officer," she said. "Sit down and have a cup of coffee."

The young policeman looked about the kitchen dubiously, but he did as he was bade. He took the chair mama offered him, and raised the cup she set before him to his lips.

"Here, have some sour cream cake with it. It's my favorite recipe," said mama. Then seating herself so that she faced him, mama placed an elbow on the table, cupped her chin in her hand and quietly stared at him. For several minutes she sat thus while the young policeman, squirming a little under her scrutiny, sipped his coffee.

"Officer, do you happen to know who that customer is that you caught by spying on us?" mama said at length. Fifteen-year-old Nellie Gady had just left through the side door with a bag of charcoal concealed under her coat.

With his mouth temporarily full of coffee cake, the young policeman opened his eyes wide and shook his head.

"She's Nellie Gady, the 'painter's' daughter. Her father has six children and Nellie is the oldest." Mama gave him a few moments for this information to sink in. Then lifting both her hands to cover her ears, she continued in a rather shrill voice. "Her mother is such a housekeeper, officer, you should never know from it! You have no idea what goes on under that roof. The house is always upside down and the children can't find nothing to wear. So they run around half-naked and barefooted. The father is all the time 'painting' pictures and the kitchen is full from garbage-tins and bones and tubes from paint. And now you're expecting me I should refuse them a bag charcoal, they should be cold also?"

The young policeman had by this time gathered the distinct impression that he had this day bitten off more than he could chew. Swallowing hard, he washed down the coffee cake with several gulps of the coffee.

"So they forgot to buying charcoal yesterday..." mama's voice went on relentlessly. "Is this a crime or something? For this they must suffer until Monday?"

Guiltily the young policeman began to defend himself. "But Mrs. Siegel..." he began, "don't you see? I was only trying to do my duty! I'm not a dirty rat! Honest I'm not."

Mama cut him short. “After all, officer, it isn’t as if we get paid for the charcoal. Believe me, we should make it in the store every week what her father owes us. That’s all I hope.”

The young policeman, bewildered and not a little unnerved, now sprang to his feet.

As I watched and papa stood mopping his brow, he made a grab for the pink slip of paper in mama’s hands, crumpled it, and mumbled something under his breath about a warning. Then he tipped his hat and as fast as he could, he sped through the kitchen and bolted out the side door.

The Slum Clearance Project

It would be putting it mildly to say that housing in Cabbagetown left a great deal to be desired. Never fine houses to begin with, now in the year 1935 brick crumbled, plaster flaked, slats and banisters were missing from fences and porches long peeled dry of paint. What the lawns lacked in grass and trees, they made up for in trash from overflowing garbage cans. There was a surplus of ownerless dogs and cats, usually fighting. And as for bugs and rodents, we were not without these blessings either. But you could depend on mama! After the war she had personally waged against them, she boasted that you couldn’t find a roach or a mouse in our store, even if you needed it for a sample.

Undeniably the general aspect of the place was depressing. And no one is denying that there were people out there who wouldn’t lift a finger to help themselves or anybody else. Cabbagetown had its loafers, its hooligans and its drunkards. But criminals, addicts, perverts? If there were any, they were not publicized. Such skeletons were carefully hidden in family closets. We were not living in the age of the media or of the euphemism. There were plenty of good plain people, struggling to raise children decently and to make the best of a bad lot. These were mama’s people, her customers and friends, and she was only too glad to help them out. She felt that she owed everybody something. Perhaps it was only a few words of general goodwill or the courtesy of listening. Then again, it might be no more than a verbal shot in the arm like the single word ‘Try!’ But mama made sure that she gave it. Graciously, with a smile on her face.

Mama wanted to write a book about her people. She would have, too, but for one drawback. She didn't know how to read or write. I was only fourteen, but I was always her confidante.

"Oh, Sophie, Sophie, if I could only write..."

"What would you write, mama?"

"If I could write, I would write a book. Yes, that's what I would do. From poor people. Living in depression time. And I would make it sad and funny. Like my life..."

Mama spoke a little Polish and German, and papa knew Russian. They spoke Yiddish equally well. But in the field of the English language, papa was hopelessly outdistanced by mama. Papa spoke his vocabulary carefully and without intentional humour. He was a little hard of hearing, and besides, he felt himself in no wise qualified to indulge in flights of literary fancy. On the occasions when he had access to a radio, he had difficulty in making out the announcer's words. They ran together too quickly for him. Anyone speaking with an English accent, he could not understand at all. So far as papa was concerned, that person *was phumphing*,

Papa had difficulty, too, in catching names. A neighbourhood child called Laura, he addressed as Flora. Stella he acknowledged as Sarah. And once at a wedding, upon being introduced to the bridegroom whose name happened to be Saul, papa shook his hand and said, "I want to wish you and your wife good luck, Charlie."

Mama, however, was an altogether different story. With her quick ear and unmistakable flair, she would utter her frills and furbelows of language with ingenuous pleasure. Of a naturally philosophical bent, she had a particular fondness for proverbs, and she would so manipulate them that they became part and parcel of her everyday speech. Truth to tell, the beginning of mama's proverbs did not always come out even with the ending.

"If the mountain won't come to the molehill," she said blithely, "then, the molehill must come to the mountain." In mama's version, Mohammed was never missed.

"Between you and me and the lamp post," somewhere in the labyrinth of mama's mind became "between you and me and the barber pole," and "love is blind" came out "love is cross-eyed," and even "cock-eyed."

"That's why Heinz makes fifty-seven varieties" was coined by mama herself. I think the inspiration came to her the day a salesman entered the store, carrying a large red and yellow poster advertising the Heinz products, fifty-seven in number. It was the company's wish, the salesman explained, to display the poster in grocery stores. And at no charge to the storekeepers, he hastened to add.

"Heinz Company makes fifty-seven products?" mama asked, wide-eyed.

The salesman nodded. "That's right. Something for every taste." With these words, he proceeded to show mama the poster and enquired, "May we have your permission to display it?"

"Oh yes!" mama assured him warmly.

"Where would you like to have it?"

Mama thought it over. Such a colourful poster, and with such a profound message... my goodness! It deserved a position of prominence. After due consideration she pointed to the centre of the shelves where the poster was sure to be seen by all who entered.

Although our neighbourhood was seldom sought after, for those of us already there it was almost as if we were planted. For us, somehow, it was impossible to escape. Mama put it this way: "Sure, move! It's easy to say. But where can you go when all you have in your pocket is a fig?"

Papa used to say that it would take no less than a miracle to get us out of Cabbagetown. And oddly enough, the miracle did arrive. In the form of the Regent Park Slum Clearance Project.

This was Canada's first venture into public housing on a large scale, and our neighbourhood had the honour of being the first to be demolished. Oh me, oh my, what didn't we have there after that? Apartment buildings and houses, all nice and tidy, with green grass and safe courts where children could play. Such conveniences! Well lit staircases with banisters; kitchens and bathrooms with hot and cold running water... But all that began much later, in the summer of 1948.

In the winter of 1935 the Project was not yet in its planning stage in Ottawa, and as for the residents of Cabbagetown, not even in our dreams. Then the old district still stood. And right in the heart of it, at the corner of Sumach and Oak Streets, stood Siegel's Groceteria, with its proprietors, my father and mother.

Mama's Best Friend

In our neighbourhood, it was no secret who was mama's best friend. Christina Badgeley was a widowed Englishwoman who took in boarders for a living. She lived at 128 Oak Street, just twelve doors away from us.

Mrs. Badgeley was middle-aged and heavy set. To my recollection, she wore only two dresses, one black, the other brown, both long and shabby. She was forever fussing with her thin grey hair. It was her intention to wear it pulled back into a sparse knot, but I never saw her but that two or three strands had somehow strayed and flopped annoyingly over an eye or an ear, or simply hung from the knot like a limp tail. In any case, Mrs. Badgeley wore only a black or a brown dress that reached nearly to her ankles, and she was always dishevelled.

Although so many years have passed since I last saw Christina Badgeley, her face has never dimmed from my memory. It was a worn, indescribably kind face. She was a simple, hard-working woman, poorly educated. But a devout Christian lady whose deep faith was reflected in her face. Her eyes were a soft brown colour, and the sheer goodness shining through them has not been easy to forget. Between Mrs. Badgeley and my mother there existed a rare and beautiful friendship. Both natively polite, they treated each other with extreme consideration. And a certain formality. For example, they never addressed each other by their given names. It was always 'Mrs. Badgeley' and 'Mrs. Siegel.'

When mama and papa bought the store, Mrs. Badgeley was their first customer. The two women took to each other immediately, and soon to their mutual fondness they added admiration and respect. But, for all that, I'm sure that neither

of them ever bothered to put their friendship into words. It was just there and they knew it. Besides, as things turned out, they had ample opportunity to prove their friendship over and over again.

In the first tense hours after Will Badgeley was stricken with his first stroke, it was mama who waited outside the hospital door with Mrs. Badgeley. Will was an invalid for seven years after that, and mama did all she could to help her friend over the rough spots. Then Will died, and mama spent long hours with Mrs. Badgeley until she made her adjustment to widowhood.

When my sister Annie was married two years before and mama had all the cooking and baking to do pertinent to holding a *simchah* at home, she could never have managed without Mrs. Badgeley's help. And I remember as a child being sick in bed. Since mama was busy in the store, Mrs. Badgeley was nursing me and reading aloud from her Bible. My sister has similar recollections.

Mrs. Badgeley would often read from her Bible to mama, and mama would listen with a soft look in her eyes and a half-smile on her lips. Whenever she could get him to listen, Mrs. Badgeley would read from her Bible, also, to papa. When reading to him, Christina chose her passages carefully, because she was so concerned about papa's unhappy disposition. Still, she got nowhere with him, for the droning of Christina's voice would make papa more irritable than ever. He would squirm with restlessness, and claiming that he had work to do, he would soon sneak away, impatiently mumbling something or other under his breath.

It didn't matter to mama that Mrs. Badgeley's Bible was the New Testament. Not that mama wasn't aware of her Jewishness. She was, and although she and papa were not strictly orthodox, they lived their lives by Jewish tradition. In our kitchen the Sabbath was always observed, as well as the dietary laws, No *traif* could be found there. We kept separate dishes for *milchik* and *flaishik*. And a third set for *Pesach*. At the Seder services we partook of *haroses*, the symbolic chopped apples in honey. For the eight days of Passover we ate *matzoh* instead of bread; on Yom Kippur we fasted; and

on Purim mama baked *hamantaschen*. Nevertheless, mama was not parochial in her outlook. "It doesn't matter what your religion is," she used to say. "God looks only in your heart." It was when her husband was first taken ill that Christina had decided to take in boarders. She converted the little back room off her kitchen into a bedroom for Will and herself, and this gave her two upstairs rooms to let out. Mama then directed a constant stream of working people to Mrs. Badgeley's house, and occasionally Christina had decent tenants. But they didn't stay long. They didn't always pay up either. And so, fine cook and housekeeper though she was, Christina often operated her boarding house at a loss.

Then Will died, leaving her without so much as a penny, and Christina found herself plagued by unpaid bills. For the funeral expenses, for heat, light and taxes, bills, bills, bills. It was at this point that mama insisted upon extending unlimited credit to her friend at the store.

Mrs. Badgeley's unpaid bill was a constant bone of contention between mama and papa. "Be reasonable, Rachel!" papa would plead. "We have bills of our own to pay."

Mama refused to take no for an answer. "Elia," she would say, "we could argue about this from today to tomorrow, and it wouldn't do you no good! We are not cutting Mrs. Badgeley off."

Indeed, Mrs. Badgeley and mama felt for each other's plight, and each had good reason to know that so long as they both should live, she had a true friend in the other.

Paul Suede

In the downstairs front bed-sitting room of Mrs. Badgeley's house, the occupant usually awoke with a start. And frantically, he opened his eyes. They were blue eyes, oddly pale, and in the morning they were bleary. How did I know all this? You may well ask. For Mrs. Badgeley who kept a constant eye on her boarder, never breathed a word of these things. Except to mama, of an evening sitting at our kitchen table where I was doing my homework. I was not intentionally eavesdropping, but I always listened, as it were, with one ear open. And sure enough, I gathered enough facts to puzzle out the habits of Mrs. Badgeley's boarder for myself. I drew the conclusion that Paul Suede was an alcoholic.

In our vicinity, very little was known about Paul Suede. From time to time, a doctor parked his automobile outside and visited him. And occasionally he had another visitor, a grey-haired, distinguished looking man who came late at night and emerged from a black limousine.

For the past eight years now, Paul Suede had occupied the best room in Mrs. Badgeley's house, the downstairs front bed-sitting room. In the eight years since he had been with her, his rent was paid every month without her even having to ask for it. Dependable as the Bank of England. Indeed, promptly on the first of the month a cheque arrived in the mail. Had it not been for Paul Suede, Mrs. Badgeley would never have begun to manage all these years. But for him, she would have had to give up her home altogether. Mrs. Badgeley was grateful. Grateful to Paul Suede, but even more grateful to the Power Above who had directed her to place her advertisement in the newspaper in

the first place. With that particular wording: "Englishwoman would let large front bed-sitting. Full board. Apply Mrs. Badgeley, 128 Oak Street." Christina spoke of that night so often that I knew the story by heart. She would finish reading aloud and close her Bible. Then her eyes would grow misty and I knew that her thoughts were slipping back over the years. And that in her mind she was reliving it all again...

In the darkness the two men stood on the front doorstep, with the suitcase beside them. One was a grey-haired man, dressed in a black coat and a bowler hat. He had broad shoulders and carried himself erect, with a fine proud posture. The other man was hatless and his hair appeared blond, rather than grey. There was about him a sort of rumpled look, as he sagged against the first man. Leaned quite heavily against him, almost as if he hadn't the strength to stand by himself.

As Christina watched unnoticed from the parlour window, she saw the grey-haired man look about the street, first up and then down. He appeared to sigh. Then he knocked at the door, and a few minutes later she answered it, opening it just enough to catch a glimpse of them.

"Mrs. Badgeley?"

She nodded.

"I am Roland Suede," the stranger said, "and this is my brother. We've come about the room."

"Would you like to see it?" asked Christina, squinting at them through the slightly opened door.

"If you don't mind," said Roland Suede softly.

"Come in, then."

"Thank you."

She led the way down the half-lit hall, and the first man followed her, escorting his brother with him. Then while the grey-haired man walked about inside the room, inspecting its contents, Christina hovered hopefully at the door. Her eyes followed him closely as he walked up and down, pulled out

drawers, felt the bed, sat in one of the chairs. And all the while the second man slouched lethargically against the wall. He was fairly tall, Christina noted. Stooped. And his eyes were very light. "That one looks ill," she thought. "And sort of lost." Still his appearance somehow suggested good breeding, and on that pale drawn face she saw traces of a certain distinction. "He's a born gentleman, that's what," Christina said to herself. Christina knew. She could tell.

Oh, if only the room would suit them! If only she could somehow rent this room it would make all the difference! Goodness knows she hadn't much luck with the other rooms. Those two upstairs bedrooms, up a steep stairway and down a dark hall as they were, had never had more than a transient appeal. From time to time, it was true, she did have a decent tenant or two up there, but invariably they vacated. Mrs. Badgeley knew the trouble, of course. It was that the sun never got at either one of the upstairs rooms. And needless to say, everyone wanted a little spot of their own where the sun shone.

One night as she had lain in her bed in the back room off the kitchen, uneasily racking her poor brain for a plan to cling to her home, the thought had occurred to Christina that her parlour was a front room. The parlour adjoined the dining room, and she really didn't need the parlour. Why not convert it into a bed-sitting, and rent it out? Surely, she had calculated, with the advantage of that huge front window through which the sun streamed in so bountifully, surely with such an advantage, and nicely furnished besides, it would attract a steady tenant.

"How much are you asking for it?" Her heart pounded. "You mean you like it?" Roland Suede glanced at her briefly. "It seems nice. How much is the rent? With full board, of course. My brother will require full board."

For an agonizing moment, Mrs. Badgeley held her breath. Then she took the plunge. "Sixty-five dollars a month," she said quickly. "In advance! I set a good table. Fine English meals. Roast

beef with Yorkshire pudding, beefsteak and kidney pie, crumpets." Her voice trailed off nervously. "My expenses are high, you understand," she added by way of justification. "The taxes here are seventy-five dollars and I use five tons of coal a year. So you can see I believe in keeping the place warm. Then there's the electricity... and the water..."

"We had other addresses," said Roland Suede gently, "but when we read that you were English..." His voice broke off. "My brother has just returned from England, and he has a great fondness for the English."

She understood. "Can you do practical nursing, Mrs. Badgeley?"

She took a furtive look at this man's brother. "Yes," she thought, "that one needs some nursing. And with that poor colour, the sunlight in the room will do him no harm." Then raising her chin, she met Roland Suede's gaze. "I am no stranger in the sick-room, sir," she declared proudly.

"Very well, Mrs. Badgeley. My brother will take the room." Sitting down at the bureau, Roland Suede withdrew a cheque book and a fountain pen from his vest pocket, and began to write.

"How do you spell your name, Mrs. Badgeley?"

"With two 'e's."

"Here is a cheque for the first month," he stated, "and in future you will receive one in the mail on the first of each month." He now handed her an envelope. "Do you have a telephone, Mrs. Badgeley?"

Christina shook her head. "No, I don't myself, but I do have the use of one. Any time. Over at the grocery store."

Roland nodded. "In the envelope," he said, "you will find two telephone numbers. One is to my brother's doctor. You will need to call him from time to time. Dr. Little is a friend of the family, and you will find him a very obliging man. He will come whenever he is needed, day or night."

"I see," said Christina, trying not to look too surprised.

For a moment, Roland Suede lowered his grey head, and Mrs. Badgeley was sure that she heard him sigh. But his lowered head hid his features, so that the look of defeat on his face escaped her. "The other telephone number is mine," he added in little more than a whisper. "If my brother should ever wish to see me, please feel free to ask me. I should be very glad to come."

"When will your brother be moving in, sir?" asked Christina.

"My brother has moved in already, Mrs. Badgeley. And just one more thing. I will be sending him a radio within the next few days. My brother enjoys listening to a radio."

He gathered up his coat and hat, and Christina followed him to the door. When they reached it, she said, "I'll help your brother unpack and get settled, sir, and have no fear, I'll take good care of him."

At her words, Roland Suede turned and looked full into Christina's face. "So this is how it must be," he seemed to think, with great bitterness. "Paul must make his home not with a family of his own, not with me, but forever with strangers."

The stranger facing him now was a heavy-set, middle-aged Englishwoman, wearing a shabby brown dress that reached nearly to her ankles. Her grey hair was untidy, pulled back from her face into a sparse knot from which several strands of hair had strayed. The face itself was worn by the trials it had witnessed. The eyes in the face were of a soft brown colour, and the sheer goodness shining through those soft brown eyes could not have escaped Roland Suede. "Thank you, Mrs. Badgeley," he said solemnly. "My brother is in great need of kindness."

This had all taken place over eight years ago. Since then, Mrs. Badgeley's association with her boarder made her out to be quite a celebrity in the district. And something of a socialite. At that

particular point in time a radio cost several hundred dollars, and Mrs. Badgeley took advantage of the fact that Paul was generous with the use of his. During his good spells she often invited a few of the neighbours in for an evening to listen to the radio; and sometimes she persuaded Paul to speak to her guests about his travels in foreign lands. It was all very impressive and made for a fine social evening.

I drew the conclusion that Paul Suede was an alcoholic who kept a supply of rye whisky in his room at all times. And every morning, sometimes without but more often with the assistance of his landlady, he got out of bed and right off poured himself a drink. Only then did he straighten. Evidently, half a tumbler of rye gulped down first thing gave him the courage he needed to face the day.

Then he put on his dressing-gown and walked slowly up the stairs to the bathroom where he washed, shaved and brushed his hair. When he returned to his room, he flicked on the dial of his radio and while he dressed, he listened to the eight o'clock news.

The greater part of Paul Suede's day was spent reading the newspaper and listening to the radio. He seldom left the house. With the exception of the doctor and occasionally his brother, he had no visitors. The remarkable thing about him was that, in spite of everything, he still maintained a keen interest in current events.

He was a well informed man, with some strong personal views. Views on the new president of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt who had been in office for two years now and whose New Deal looked to him as if it needed more time to prove itself. Views on the Prime Minister of England, James Ramsay MacDonald whom Paul considered too mild a man to lead Britain's first Labour Government. The indifference of the French appalled him. He thought that the handsome young premier, Pierre Etienne

Flandin, would do well to pay less attention to his grouse-shooting in Scotland and more to that neighbour of his to the right, who was breathing rather heavily down his neck. "I tell you he's in Germany to stay!" he told Mrs. Badgeley that early March day in 1935. "From the look of things, the Germans actually want him!"

As she bustled about serving breakfast, Mrs. Badgeley made vague noises that were meant to be soothing.

"You can't believe a word he says!" Paul went on, propping his newspaper against the sugar bowl. "He's already broken the Treaty of Versailles by arming Germany! There'll be no stopping him now!"

"There, there, Mr. Suede, don't go on excitin' yourself like that," said Mrs. Badgeley. "You'll feel better when you've had your tea."

Christina Badgeley did not understand. Nor did Paul's fellow boarders who were seated across the table from him. They were the Misses Victoria and Alicia Newhall, single ladies in their early seventies. It was Victoria and Alicia's policy to pay little attention to what they considered Paul's rantings. Aware of his condition, they made allowances for hallucinations. And taking Mrs. Badgeley's example, they were patient with him. They knew he meant no harm. If he should sometimes address one of them specifically she would simply nod in agreement. All three women were agreed that what the man needed was to calm his nerves with a good hot cup of English tea, brisk and properly brewed.

Noting how little Paul ate, Christina suggested, "The next time Dr. Little comes, you ask him for an iron tonic. You don't eat enough to keep a bird alive, and that's the truth."

But Paul only pointed an unsteady finger at her. "Didn't I tell you they'd get the Saar Valley without any trouble? They had their eye on it all along. They got it all right, coal mines and all! The League of Nations didn't stop them, did it? The League has no power and that's the trouble with the world!" He shook his head. "The new president is too busy with his own problems to notice

what's going on outside the United States, and the average Canadian is more interested in the romance of the Prince of Wales with that Baltimore beauty than in what's happening in Europe. But what's the average Briton thinking about that he's so indifferent to what's going on across the Channel? Is no one to stop them? They've got the Saar already; Danzig will be next; after that, it will be the Polish Corridor. And what about the refugees? Where are they to go? Doesn't anybody care?"

The three women eyed one another. The man was certainly wound up this morning, their glances said.

"There now, Mr. Suede," said Christina. "Now have your tea, there's a good lad."

Paul obeyed. He was exhausted. Besides, the uncomprehending faces of his audience discouraged him.

"Now don't you go troublin' your poor head no more. You just leave all that politickin' stuff to the big men what's running the world."

"Well, I don't know what they're waiting for," Paul muttered into his tea. "If they don't watch out, he'll toss us all into another bloody war!"

Cabbagetown's Pixillated Sisters

The Misses Victoria and Alicia Newhall were Cabbagetown's town pixillated sisters. These gentle ruins of time were faded and much lined, and both needed spectacles to make their way about. Their lurid imaginations, however, belied their fragile appearance and gentle mannerisms. They were forever reporting evil men threatening to undermine their character and fictitious seducers intent upon tempting them to stray from their straight and narrow path. In addition, they possessed a morbid streak that gloated over other people's misfortunes and hungered for the details. At present the sisters occupied one of Mrs. Badgeley's upstairs rooms; had occupied it, in fact, for almost a year. Mrs. Badgeley had let them have it for forty dollars a month, and since they were on a tiny annuity, it was the best they could afford. Actually, Victoria and Alicia didn't mind the room. Among other features, it had a good double bed and underneath the bed, all that space for storage for their numerous cardboard boxes, which contained the belongings of a lifetime. But it was true, what everybody said about the room. That the sun never got at it. And when the spinsters emerged of a morning to do a little shopping at the grocery store, they were dazzled by the brightness of the day. When they returned, it took their watery old eyes quite a while to discern objects again. Outside of that, it was a perfectly nice room, warm and cozy. And no one could wish for a finer landlady than Mrs. Badgeley.

When Victoria and Alicia made their appearance in the store this morning, they found both the storekeepers busy.

Mama was serving Mrs. Baldovich, who was there with Arala, and papa was racing to answer the telephone. The sisters took this opportunity to admire the fruit, which they could not afford to buy. Side by side, in one motion they moved to the fruit counter, which was their favorite spot to wait.

Since papa was hard of hearing, he could be at the fruit section at the front of the store and the telephone at the back could ring four or five times before he was aware of it. Then when he did hear it, anxious lest a customer hang up in impatience, papa would hasten to it, hurriedly lift the receiver and, from the bottom of his lungs, shout "Siegel's!" Very often he startled an unsuspecting caller at the other end of the wire. But once he made his contact, papa's voice lowered politely." 114 Oak Street, did you say? Certainly... about eleven o'clock, I would say... certainly..." Withdrawing his order pad from his apron pocket and taking the pencil from behind his ear, papa laboriously took down the order for delivery. "Five pounds of potatoes, yes?... one carton of cottage cheese... yes?... a bottle of ketchup... yes, yes?"

When papa had finished with his telephone order, he came up behind the Newhall sisters at the fruit counter. "Can I help you with anything?" His loud voice alarmed them a little.

"Oh dear! Well, yes, I mean, no. We'd like to vise the telephone, if we may, Mr. Siegel."

"Of course."

The sisters now fluttered to the telephone, and Alicia withdrew a tiny newspaper clipping from her purse. They had read a depressing piece of news in last night's obituary column, and they were anxious to make the most of it. "We have learned that an old acquaintance has passed away," Alicia explained to papa, "and we just wanted to ask what was the cause of death."

Before leaving the store, Victoria and Alicia were careful to confide further in their storekeeper. Apparently they felt it only fair, since papa was good enough to share his telephone with them, that they share their depressing news with papa. "He died

of pneumonia,” stated Alicia, and taking pleasure in embellishing the details of their acquaintance’s demise, she added, “He was in a coma for four days.”

“He didn’t recognize his wife or any of the children,” contributed Victoria. As papa stared at them wordlessly, the demure pair reached the door and, turning, they smiled at him politely. “Well, we want to thank you, Mr. Siegel” they said more or less in unison, “for the use of your telephone. We appreciate it very much.”

Mama, Papa and Me

“Now where’s that sketch from last night’s paper?” I mumbled. “I mustn’t forget to give it to mama on my way out.”

Tuesday was a typical school day. In my bedroom over the kitchen, I arranged my tie. It was folded several times, ironed into a thin strip and knotted at the waist. I was dressing in my school uniform, which consisted of white middy with black tie, navy skirt, long black stockings and white running shoes. This was the compulsory physical training uniform for girls at the high school I attended. Jarvis Street Collegiate, at the corner of Wellesley. In Miss St. John’s class, 2C, physical training periods were on Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons. However, some of us wore our uniforms every day, all day, Tuesdays and Thursdays included. I managed nicely, since I owned two middies. Shoes were cleaned and stockings washed on the weekend, but the skirt, which was permanently pleated, needed no attention at all.

Yes, the Jarvis uniform gave good wear. It would last the duration of high school, a matter of five years. New stockings were needed at the beginning of each year, and shoes every second. An additional middy was usually required by Third and Fifth. But unless a girl grew noticeably, the skirt should last out the entire five years. The skirts never wore out.

That the uniform was compulsory was of importance to me, and to my two school chums, Faye Baldovich and Constance Seymour. The uniform made everyone appear equal. It consequently took a girl’s mind off her appearance and set it free for her studies.

There were some girls in 2C who had pretty clothes.

They wore them when the class took no physical training. These girls looked adorable in their trim plaid skirts and soft pastel sweaters, with their legs in silk stockings and tiny high heels on their shoes. But then, they came from another background. Such girls were an altogether different breed from Faye Baldovich, Constance Seymour and me.

The bureau in my bedroom stood on four uneven legs. It contained a single drawer and a cloudy mirror that tilted at the touch of a finger. Leaning forward, I studied my reflection. I gazed deeply into my eyes and smiled mysteriously. The face that looked back at me was rather pretty, I suppose. I had straight brown hair, wide grey eyes and full lips like papa's; from mama I had inherited my olive skin, along with a distinct tendency towards plumpness. However, what I saw in the mirror was a potential ravishing beauty. "Wait until you're a little older," I promised myself. "Just wait until you wear lipstick and pluck your eyebrows." Straightening, I passed a comb through my bobbed hair, and stepping back, ran a final check over my uniform.

"Oh yes, the sketch," I reminded myself, and rummaged through the bureau drawer until I found it. I didn't then realize the significance of such advertisements in mama's life; I only know that she was keenly interested in them.

The inviting aroma of coffee perking on the kitchen stove drifted upstairs and as always made my nose wrinkle. I adored coffee, and although I was only fourteen, I was already addicted to it for life. I simply could not remember a time when mama didn't have a huge pot of coffee on the stove.

Downstairs in the kitchen, mama was standing at her coal stove while papa sat at the table, warming himself over a second cup of coffee. Mama was then forty-five years old. She had dark deep-set eyes and abundant black hair streaked here and there with grey, which she wore parted in the centre and fastened with oversize hairpins in a wide bun at the back of her head. Not very tall, mama was round and plump, with firm shapely

shoulders and a well-formed bosom. She habitually wore a printed housedress and an unbuttoned cardigan under a white butcher's apron. Although it was only 7:45 in the morning, mama was already preparing the evening meal, and as she set about her cooking, she was humming happily. Mama had never heard of the 'liberated' woman, but she knew how to work. She worked right along with papa from morning till night, and she was happy to do it. Always as she worked, mama accompanied herself with a song.

There was a lull of perhaps fifteen minutes between the seven-o'clock crowd at the store when the workmen, heading for the nearby factories, came in for their tobacco, and the eight-o'clock breakfast rush. Long enough for papa to relax over a second cup of coffee and for mama to put on the day's cooking. It was long enough also for her to pop one of her delectable sour cream coffee cakes into the oven. For mama was not a woman to waste her minutes. Mama never used a recipe. No, like her philosophy for living, which consisted loosely of two fistfuls of work, a cup of song, a great heaping scoop of love, a handful each of charity, gumption and humour, plus a dash of temper, the only measurements mama knew for cooking and baking were a *zmenia*, half a handful, a handful, two handfuls, etcetera.

A pot of chicken soup was always there, for good reason. It symbolized, perhaps unconsciously, mama's sense of mitzvah. Mama could not be expected to know exactly when someone in the neighbourhood might require some special nourishment. Some delicate child, perhaps; some convalescent mother who had recently given birth; or a chronically ill person, like Mrs. Badgeley's boarder, Mr. Suede. And so, the chicken soup stood perennially on our stove in its deep white pot with the red rim, alongside the oversize coffee pot, now thoroughly chipped by long years of loyal service.

Mama's stove was the centre of our kitchen. Huge and black, it gave out comforting crackling noises along with its warmth. Beside it on the floor stood a scuttle and other accoutrements. And behind these rose a round black pipe, right up through the ceiling to my bedroom, where it carried on its job of warming before continuing on its course to roof and chimney.

Since my sister Annie was married, I had the second bedroom all to my self. Annie had married two years before, and so there were only the three of us left at home now—my father Elia, my mother Rachel and me. Of course, I'm Sophie.

The Breadman, the Milkman and the Condiment Salesman

Life was progressing normally on that Tuesday morning long ago. Outside our store, a horse-drawn bread wagon drew up at the curb, and the driver, an elderly man wearing a coarse brown cardigan buttoned to the throat against the cold, entered the store. As he opened the door, the bell sounded. It was a quaint little bell, rigged in such a way that each time the door opened or shut it was struck.

“Ding-a-ling-a-ling, Ding-a-ling-a-ling.” Back in the kitchen, mama placed the lid firmly on the pot of chicken soup. “Elia,” she said, “that will be George.” Papa took a final gulp of coffee, placed the cup on the table and descended the five steps from the living quarters to the store. Papa, at forty-eight, was grey at the temples and his brown hair was beginning to thin. He had heavy eyebrows, solemn grey eyes, a short straight nose and a shapely mouth that was full-lipped and sulky. On the rare occasions when papa felt inclined to smile, he did so slowly, almost reluctantly. His body was top heavy, the thick shoulders and chest tapering to slim hips. Under his butcher's apron, papa's everyday clothes consisted of dark trousers and a tweedy vest buttoned over an open necked shirt. On colder days, to this outfit he would add his blue cardigan with the ribbed collar and cuffs and the double elbows that mama had knitted for him years ago. As papa entered the store, George was already filling the empty bread bin from the basket over his arm. “I gave you eighteen loaves today, Mr. Siegel, and two dozen assorted rolls,” he said, entering the amount in his accounts book

with a lead pencil that he had first darted into his mouth. The breadman was a shrunken little person with wispy grey hair and faded blue eyes. As he looked up at papa now, his dry lips formed into a tight little smile. "And congratulations on the birth of your grandson."

"Thank you very much, George," said papa, smiling and slowly revealing his strong even teeth. "Ding-a-ling. Ding-a-ling-a-ling." The bell sounded again, and summoned mama to take her post behind the counter, while papa naturally gravitated to the fruit section. It was an unwritten law that the long counter and the Dry Goods Department was mama's half of the store and that the rest belonged to papa.

Now that his business dealings were accomplished, George Williams placed his bread basket on the floor. Taking his time, he walked through the store up the steps and right into our kitchen. Once there, George strolled to the china cabinet, helped himself to cup, saucer and spoon, crossed to the stove and poured himself a cup of coffee. I was eating my breakfast at the table, and paid almost no attention to him.

The second time the bell rang, it ushered in a young blond man. This was Freddie the milkman, and he came in carrying his wire basket over his arm. Freddie was always smiling, and he smiled now as he exclaimed, "*Mazeltov*, Mrs. Siegel! How does it feel to be a grandmother?"

"It feels wonderful, Freddie," replied mama, returning his smile. With his easy stride, Freddie swung over to the ice-box, opened its windows and proceeded to fill one side with milk and cream. From the other side he lifted out half a loaf of brick cheese and examined it critically. "I'll change this for a fresh piece, Mrs. Siegel," he said, "and I see that your cottage cheese is low. I'd better give you half a dozen today."

He arranged the fresh cheese inside, closed the windows of the ice-box, and placed his basket on the floor. Then in two strides he climbed the five steps to the kitchen where he also

helped himself to cup, saucer and spoon and poured himself a cup of coffee.

Within minutes we were joined by a third man. He was Mr. McGillivray, a condiment salesman. Mr. McGillivray was tall and gaunt and dressed in grey, which somehow matched the colour of his skin. He too was a regular morning visitor for coffee.

"Morning, Arthur," said Freddie. "How's business this week?"

Mr. McGillivray shrugged his thin shoulders.

"Just for fun, Arthur," said Freddie, smiling, "let's hear it."

At this invitation Mr. McGillivray speedily rattled off the list of condiments he had for sale. His rendition would have done justice to any poem.

"Salt, mustard, vinegar, pepper," he began, "vanilla, paprika, allspice, thyme, cloves, cinnamon, sour salt, nutmeg, baking powder, baking soda, extract of lime, almond extract, garlic extract, chicory, dill, powdered onion, celery, H. P. sauce."

There was something amusing about it, and we all smiled. Then the three men hunched over their coffee in earnest. They were very much at home in each others' company. They had met in this room many times before.

A moment later, I put on my coat, flung my scarf around my neck and, gathering my school books, bid them a hasty "Bye, now." Then in my usual morning rush, I scurried down the steps and through the store. "Bye, mama. Bye, papa. Oh mama, I almost forgot! Here's the sketch of the suit from last night's paper." Without stopping, I handed mama the clipping over the counter, and hurried out the door.

The Honeymoon Suit

The store was now vacant of customers until the noon-hour rush. Mama busied herself unwrapping cartons and arranging packages in the tobacco case, and papa took this opportunity to fill out his morning orders for the delivery, which he would make later, on foot. Lifting his eyes from his order pad, he addressed mama. “What kind of sketch was that Sophie gave you this morning?”

Mindful that papa was easily vexed, mama was careful to answer gently. “Elia, it’s a suit from last night’s paper. And it’s on sale. Sophie cut it out for me.”

“I can tell that Sophie cut it out for you,” replied papa. He could never figure out why mama kept herself posted on the latest fashions being shown for milady.

Her reasons must have been private, for to his recollection mama had never managed to assemble a complete outfit all at one time. Occasionally she had a new dress, and at Passover time she usually bought herself a pair of shoes. But a dress, coat, hat, shoes and purse to match — an ensemble? Never. Nonetheless, mania’s interest on the subject did not flag, and now extracting the bit of paper from her apron pocket, she looked at it fondly before handing it over to papa. ‘It says,’ she quoted accurately/’from our first showing of suits for spring. Baton’s features an advance sale. Mangone suit, tailored Regency fashion in flannel, sixty-nine dollars and fifty cents.”

Papa jolted. “Sixty-nine fifty! What are you showing it to me for?”

“But you asked me!”

“Well, I don’t want to see it after all,” said papa irritably. “Is it any different now than it ever was? Is it? Ever since we’re married? Even before we were married?”

“All right, Elia, don’t get excited.” Mama’s tone was one of appeasement. “It doesn’t cost nothing just to looking in the paper. It’s not a reason to aggravating yourself.”

But papa was plainly aggravated. It had taken only a moment for his mood to change, and now with an angry flash of his grey eyes, he snapped, “Aggravate myself? Why shouldn’t I? You could have had a dozen suits by now, if there wasn’t always something more important to buy! Someone more important than ourselves to think about! If I live to be a hundred, Rachel, I’ll never forget that first suit. Never!”

As was his habit, papa now inserted his fingers deep into his vest pocket, drew out his watch, which hung on a chain, and opened it. On one side there was a photograph of mama as a young woman, with a sweet smile upon her face and her thick black hair piled high upon her head. It was almost an unconscious motion on papa’s part, whenever he was aggravated, to gaze upon this old photograph. Somehow he drew comfort from it, for each time he regarded it, a crooked little smile began to play at the corners of his lips and an expression, oddly tender for him, crossed his face. “What a beautiful young girl you were, Rachel,” he said for the thousandth time, “and with such a head of hair.” Papa snapped the watch shut and replaced it in his vest pocket. “It still hurts me when I think about it.”

“Elia,” said mama gently, “you know it was more important to bringing Esther over from the Old Country than for me to having a suit.”

“Even for a honeymoon?”

“Of course.”

In truth, after a quarter of a century, the memory of that day was still painful. Papa could recall every detail.

It was a Friday evening twenty-five years ago. And papa, dressed in his good suit, the blue serge, had come to partake of the Sabbath dinner at mania's boarding house. Papa was a handsome young man in those days, slim and straight, with wide grey eyes and thick brown hair. I'm sure that the dark suit he wore that evening contrasted strikingly with his light eyes and fair skin.

For a slight charge, mama's landlady, Mrs. Pickle, used to set a place for papa along with her other boarders every Friday evening. Papa's own landlady was very old, and she preferred to observe the Sabbath alone. As he sat across the table from mama during the meal, papa noted the troubled look on her face. However, he did not have the opportunity to question her, for after dinner he joined the other men in the parlour while the women tidied up. But later, when mama came out of the kitchen, they put on their coats and took a walk together. Once outside, mama turned to him. "Walk towards Gold's," she said.

It was evident that there was something on her mind. "What is it, Rachel?" he pleaded. "Tell me what's wrong tonight."

Mama's lips tightened. "I received a letter from Esther today. Mrs. Pickle read it to me this morning." (Like mama's sister, mama's landlady could read and write in Yiddish).

"So?"

"She wants I should send her a ticket."

Papa slowly nodded his head. "But why you?" he objected.

"Who else is there, Elia? Our whole *mispochah* is poor."

"But how can you?" said papa earnestly. "You're so rich?"

You're getting such a rich *choson?*

Mama looked thoughtful. "If I could maybe put away four dollars a week..."

"How can you put away four, when you only make eight?"

"I know a way I could make ten," said mama.

"You do? How?"

"I could work overtime."

"Overtime?" papa repeated the word. "They have extra work at the factory?"

"Not exactly," said mama, glancing away from him quickly, "but I could make an extra two dollars a week if I washed the floor. The foreman was asking last week if any of us girls wanted to doing it. Hilda used to, but she had to quitting since she had the baby."

"But that big floor!" papa cried bitterly.

"It would only be one night a week, Elia," mama pointed out, "and only till I save up enough for the ticket."

"But I don't want you should get on your hands and knees and wash the floor for that *paskudnack*" papa protested.

"Oh Elia, don't feel that way," pleaded mama, "because I don't mind."

"And even if you do it, then what?"

"Then if I could save four dollars a week for the next three or four months..."

"Yes?" said papa, eyeing her suspiciously.

"And if I cancel my suit right away, and if Mr. Gold will maybe give me back my deposit..."

"Yes?"

"Then I would have enough to sending for her by *Chaul Hamoed*" she concluded.

"Exactly ten days before our wedding," observed papa with a wry smile.

By this time they were standing in front of the tailoring shop, peering into the window at the mannequin standing there. The mannequin was wearing a model of the suit mama had ordered for herself. It was to be a soft blue-grey tweed, tailor-made to fit mama's voluptuous figure, with the hip-length jacket popular in that era, and a grey wolf collar.

Papa shook his head. "It isn't right, Rachel. It's too much to ask from you."

"But for such a reason, Elia!" mama urged.

“It isn’t right that you should pay such a price.”

“Elia, I must do it,” mama now stated. “She’s my sister. We have no parents. Don’t you understand? She needs a mitzvah from me, and I must do it for her!”

Papa remained unconvinced. “It still isn’t right,” he insisted. “There’s something wrong with it.”

They returned to the tailoring shop on Monday night after work, when Mr. Gold himself was there. Papa waited outside while mama went in. He could see her speaking apologetically to the old tailor, and Mr. Gold gesturing. Finally the old man withdrew a worn bill-fold from his pocket, and first licking his fingers, he counted off three bills and handed them to mama. Evidently Mr. Gold had not yet started on mama’s suit, and he was giving her back her deposit.

A thin smile touched her lips as mama came out of the shop, but papa was in a black mood. He would never forget this night. Neither would he ever forgive Esther for sending that letter.

Auntie Esther arrived in Canada in time to attend mama’s wedding, and within the year she was herself married. To a house painter, and living on the other side of the same street. It was a full two years later before papa decided one day to cross the road to have a few words with his relatives. By this time my sister Annie had been born, and there was only papa’s meagre paycheque coming in. Papa chose his words carefully, He appealed to Auntie Esther and her husband Morris to repay mama, at least in part, for Esther’s passage money.

Auntie Esther was genuinely sorry, but literally penniless. She also had little opportunity to speak. It was Morris who did the talking for both of them. Although extremely apologetic, he made it clear that he could contribute nothing. Morris explained that the painting trade was not good lately, that he often found himself

laid off for days at a time. Besides, they had just purchased a house in the West End, and with a baby coming in the spring...

After that conversation, papa and Uncle Morris remained content to like each other from a distance. And poor Auntie Esther did not much appreciate the resentment in papa’s grey eyes whenever they two met.

This was the period of her life when mama took to peddling. Mornings she left the baby with Auntie Esther and, took a trip to Baton’s. There she bought such wares as towels, tablecloths, curtains, men’s workshirts and children’s underwear; then in the evenings, leaving little Annie in papa’s care, she peddled her purchases from door to door.

Before long, mama had become a shrewd shopper, and in due course, she opened a Deposit Account with Baton’s. She put money into it whenever she had it handy, and thus was free to take advantage of good buys.

Soon there was a favorite group of salespeople at the department store cooperating with mama, putting aside for her merchandise that was on sale and tipping her off as to which goods were scheduled to be reduced in price.

Mama continued with her peddling all through the years. In fact, to this very day there were several dedicated customers who, poor shoppers themselves, were dependent upon mama for certain of their needs.

Later, on that Tuesday March morning of 1935, mama and papa found themselves temporarily alone in the store. I had left for school, and mama had shown papa the clipping from the previous evening’s newspaper. The one advertising the new season’s suits for milady.

And now, as they often did, she standing behind her counter and he at the fruit section, mama and papa took this opportunity to have an argument.

“So, Elia, what are you aggravating yourself today? What’s on your mind?”

“Today, Rachel, I’m thinking about you and me, when we were young. And also about that *mispochah* of yours.”

“What about them?”

“How they came straight to us. How they slept on the floor and how they kept you hopping looking after them. And how we never received a dollar from anybody.”

“All right,” said mama, “I’ll answer you everything. First, where else were such greenhorns to go; second, they needed our help until they got settled, and third, I didn’t do it for money. I did it for a mitzvah.”

“You and your mitzvahs,” papa replied testily. “It’s the story of your life, isn’t it? Helping everybody.”

By now mama was also remembering the earlier years of her marriage, but her thoughts turned not to her extended family, but to a tragedy. The death of her brother Nathan at the age of twenty-two. She answered papa bitterly, “Don’t say everybody. How much did I help Nathan?” She reached into her apron pocket for her handkerchief to wipe away her tears. “My own brother, and I didn’t help him nothing.”

“So who could help him,” said papa, “if the sickness was already eating up his lungs when he came to us?” Papa was aware that this argument had gone too far and in an effort to placate mama, he added. “It wasn’t your fault. Nobody is so smart that they can control their whole life.”

“But it’s such a heartache,” said mama sadly. “Such a golden young man. But he had no years.”

“I didn’t mean to upset you, Rachel,” said papa, now completely contrite. “Actually I didn’t mean nothing. But you know how it is with me, I’m a man. You’re my wife. I would like to

buy you that suit in the paper, so you could get all dressed up when you go to visit our grandchild. After all, some men’s wives have several assorted suits.”

“And some have suits and no grandchild,” said mama. “Did you ever think of that?”

Papa’s lips tightened. He knew from long experience that mama would win this argument. Somehow she managed to emerge triumphant from them all.

“How many times have I told you, Rachel, that I envy you your *tava*?”

“And how many times have I told you, Elia, be satisfied.” said mama, now loudly blowing her nose.

Papa heaved a sigh. “I’m satisfied,” he said wearily, “I’m satisfied.”

Mrs. Wiggins and Mrs. Maloney

At peace with himself for the moment, papa sauntered to the plate glass window and looked out. “Aha!” he remarked. “Here they come, the two of them.”

“Who?” asked mama.

“My Goodness with *Die Roita*”

The customers entered together. The first was a drab little woman in her early thirties. She had a pinched face, two front teeth missing, and wore a shapeless green coat. On her arm she held a good-sized baby. Only the baby’s chubby little face peeked out at the world from under the shawl that enveloped him. Contrastingly, the second woman was a good ten years older than her companion. She had a short broad figure and was a high-spirited individual with cropped reddish-grey hair and a ruddy complexion. They were Mrs. Wiggins and Mrs. Maloney respectively.

Papa had a habit. He often identified people by a physical trait, a personal characteristic or an idiosyncrasy. Thus, a housewife who purchased a lot of soap became *Die Kliene*; one who possessed a nervous giggle was *Die Komishka*, and a workingman who often borrowed books from the lending library was *Der Professor*.

Mrs. Maloney owed her nickname to her reddish coloring, and the reason Mrs. Wiggins had been dubbed ‘My Goodness’ will soon become clear.

“Good morning, ladies,” said papa.

“Good morning to you both,” said mama.

“Good morning,” replied Mrs. Maloney.

“Good morning. My goodness, but it’s cold today,” said Mrs. Wiggins.

“How is the baby?” mama wanted to know, and she leaned over and tickled him under his soft chin.

“Oh my goodness, he’s fussy, Mrs. Siegel.”

Withdrawing her voucher from her purse, Mrs. Maloney handed it to papa. “Here is my voucher, Mr. Siegel,” she said. “It’s signed.” Her features now relaxed into a broad smile, as with an air of finality she declared, “A month from today, by cracky, my Orv and me will be off the pokey!”

“That’s very nice,” replied papa politely. “Glad to hear that Mr. Maloney is going back to work.”

“Right you are!” affirmed Mrs. Maloney. “On the first of April.”

Papa smiled, but only slightly, for he had mixed feelings about any good fortune that might befall Orville Maloney. “I’ll fill your order for you right away,” he said.

“And I’ll look after yours, Mrs. Wiggins,” said mama.

Mama and papa knew by heart the list of groceries indicated on the backs of the relief vouchers and while their customers waited, they darted about the store, quickly assembling the orders. With every move she made this morning, mama suspected that Mrs. Wiggins was watching her. Then turning her head, mama met her gaze. It was true, Mrs. Wiggins was watching her, and with an almost feverish look.

“Is anything wrong, Mrs. Wiggins?”

Mrs. Wiggins blushed. She was very shy. “Mrs. Siegel,” she began in a shaking voice, “I wonder if I might speak to you in private?”

“Of course.” Mama came from behind the counter and met Mrs. Wiggins at the far end of the cigarette case. “My goodness, I was just wondering if I might ask a favour of you today, Mrs. Siegel,” Mrs. Wiggins stammered.

“I’ll be glad to oblige, if I can,” mama reassured her.

“It’s about my voucher.”

“Yes.”

Mrs. Wiggins swallowed. Then she shifted the baby into a more comfortable position. “Mrs. Siegel,” she said finally, “I have lots of porridge in the house and the children don’t eat much farina. I was wondering if this week I couldn’t perhaps get a can of pink salmon instead.” The poor woman’s self-consciousness was excruciating. “I realize it isn’t on the list, but I could make some patties out of it. My goodness, but it would be a nice change!”

Mama’s eyebrows lifted and her eyes lit up. Then she turned, removed a large can of pink salmon from one of the shelves and silently placing a forefinger to her lips, she slipped it in with the rest of the order. Mrs. Wiggins looked on guiltily, but mama felt fine. What she had just done she considered a mitzvah, and Mrs. Wiggins had given her a good start to her day.

The Good Husband

Papa had a theory. It was to the effect that although Maude Maloney and Hazel Wiggins were constant companions, they were not friends. He said that Maude needed Hazel and Hazel, who was afraid of Maude, couldn’t get away from her. The two occupied poky little houses attached to each other by only a thin wall, and when Maude knocked on the wall, Hazel ran.

When the house next to hers was first vacated, Maude had her qualms about the people who should next occupy it. And from her post behind her curtains she peered out anxiously, as the truck carrying the new tenants pulled up. But then the sight of Hazel clutching her newest baby in her arms, with three or four bedraggled toddlers in her wake, caused Maude to breathe easy. She could tell that her new neighbor could easily be dominated.

Maude was very vocal. She considered that she had little cause to complain. To begin with, she proclaimed to all and sundry, she had a good husband. It made her happy that her husband Orville was fair. On the occasions when their daughter slipped a dollar or two out of her pay into Maude’s hand, Orville let Maude keep the money. That’s how fair he was. Furthermore, Maude stated with pride, Orville was unemployed only during the winter, a mere matter of six months a year. The rest of the time he worked, as a wheelsman on a tug down at Toronto harbour. Consequently, they had to resort to government relief only half the time.

Then too, Maude’s daughter was off her hands. Norah was in service for a respectable family way out in that there Forest Hill Village. And Maude could rest easy in the knowledge that the girl had lots to eat and a nice room all to her-self. Yes, Maude had got out easy with her daughter. Norah was a good girl, not like some

others that she could point a finger at. The girl came home only on her day off, and even then she was busy at the ballpark.

And whereas Orville Maloney was not too popular among the neighbours, by Maude's standards at least, he was a good husband. Maude would proclaim to anyone within earshot that her husband never laid a hand on her. She made this statement with pride, but it was not wholly true. It was only half true. The whole truth was that Orville never laid a hand on Maude, except when he was drunk. And then, well, Maude had to admit, things could get a little out of hand.

This is where papa's theory came in. It was for such times, papa pointed out, that Maude required an ally in her next door neighbour. A homebody, preferably a person with nursing experience, a quiet person who would not go off snitching to the police. And Hazel Wiggins fit right into the picture. Hazel was as close-lipped as they came; she stayed home at nights; there was no husband in sight, and with all those children, she had plenty of nursing experience.

Truth to tell, in the winter when Orville was laid off, such occasions seldom arose. Not until he was working and payday rolled around, did he get together with a few friends at the house for drinks. Maude was not averse to taking a drop or two, either. Then, you know how it was, one drink led to another, and well... The fact was that sometimes all hell broke loose. And Maude was very glad to have Hazel Wiggins to call upon in the attached house.

Together, she and Hazel had worked out a code. Voices were not to be alarmed at. Only knocks. Three knocks on the wall meant 'Be on guard!' And five in rapid succession meant 'Help!'

Maude knew that in a pinch she could also count on mama's cooperation. Here was a mitzvah to be done, if mama ever saw one, and the occasion always found her prepared with a good supply of bandages, slings, iodine, rubbing alcohol and such things. Furthermore, Maude appreciated mama's attitude. Mama never

asked silly questions when she tended to Maude's cuts and bruises; mama knew better.

Maude never uttered a single word in disparagement of her husband. He was her lord and master, and she had a deep respect for his manly chauvinistic ways. No wet blanket herself, Maude was not a woman to spoil a man's fun. Also, she took things into consideration. After all, when sober there was no more peace-loving man than Orville Maloney.

I saw him occasionally when I delivered a parcel to the house. A beefy fellow with a blank red face and flat blue eyes, he was the Archie Bunker of 1935, wont to sit in his undershirt all winter long, the curly hairs of his armpits showing dark against the soft white flesh of his arms. Thus he would sit behind his newspaper, wallowing morosely in his prejudices. He never indulged in idle chatter, and he seldom laughed. Not that he didn't possess a sense of humour. It was perhaps peculiar to himself, but it was a sense of humour, just the same.

For example, there were the fires. When Orville heard a siren, he would jump from his customary stupor, and as fast as his legs would carry him, he would chase after the truck. Many neighbours saw him do this. Arriving at the fire, Orville would stand before it and chuckle. Once he had even been overheard laughing boisterously. On that occasion he had been informed that a fireman had suffered a broken arm. "Right arm or left?" Orville had inquired. "Simple or compound fracture?"

He never once set foot in our store. For his part, papa dismissed him sarcastically as 'the good husband.' "Get the iodine and bandages ready," papa would caution mama on a Saturday afternoon as, looking through the plate-glass window, he glimpsed him passing the store with a case of beer hoisted on his shoulder. "Get everything ready. The good husband is throwing a party tonight."

Harriet Harris

The two orders were on the counter. Mama and papa were about to gather them into bags when Maude Maloney walked to the window to peer out at the street. “Just as I thought!” she exclaimed. “There goes that hairdresser from Harriet’s house again. Our girl has had her hair marcelled again this morning.”

Mrs. Wiggins shifted the baby to her other arm, and joined her formidable companion at the window. She too looked out. “My goodness,” she said.

“Wouldn’t you think,” asserted Maude, now confronting Hazel, “she’d go out to a hairdressing parlour to get her hair set? Wouldn’t you?”

“Yes, you would,” said Hazel, timidly backing away.

“But not Harriet Harris!” Maude lifted her hand delicately in some sarcasm. “She is to the manor born, didn’t you know? Or haven’t you heard?”

“My goodness,” said Hazel.

Mama, charged always with a sense of justice, felt prompted to interrupt. “Oh well, she’s never gone hungry, so she’s a little spoiled. What could you expect?”

“You could expect her to appreciate it, that’s what!” Maude huffed. “Her husband was always a good provider, and when he died he left her that beautiful house all paid for. And look at her sons! They’ve got jobs, all right! With prospects of advancement!”

Hazel Wiggins broke in. “She’s coming out of her house, and it looks like she’s headed here.”

Maude quickly gathered up her bag and shoved Hazel’s into her free arm. Grasping the bag and clutching the baby, Hazel scrambled after Maude, as they made their hasty exit.

Harriet Harris carried herself straight and proud. A large handsome woman with fine brown eyes and waving grey hair cut short and worn close to her head, Harriet was well groomed at all times. Today she wore a dark suit under her tailored coat, and over her arm she carried a handbag made of genuine snakeskin. She was a person who took great pride in her appearance.

But Harriet took no pride in her present address. After the fine residential area they were accustomed to, Sumach Street was a great letdown for her and her two sons. She made no attempt to hide the fact that she considered herself better than her neighbours. Oddly enough, she appeared to approve of us. Mrs. Harris was always very pleasant to my sister and me, and she quite obviously enjoyed chatting with mama. “I still have a few friends in Rosedale and I prefer to associate with them,” she confided in mama. Harriet made it quite clear that she had not always lived on the wrong side of the tracks. We knew all about the fine home in Rosedale.

Indeed, when her late husband was alive, Harriet and her sons had lacked for nothing. *On* his very deathbed, it was his family’s welfare that had concerned Edward Harris. Calling his wife to his side, Edward had cautioned Harriet about her irresponsibility with money. “You won’t have to worry about the boys’ education. That’s all been taken care of,” he had reassured her. “But you will have to make some adjustments. There are certain extravagances...”

“Oh, Edward,” Harriet had begged. “Please don’t ask me to think about anything like that!”

“You must face it, dearest,” Edward had warned softly. “You and the boys must go on living without me.”

Harriet had refused to take heed. Never at any time did she have a head for business. Moreover, she enjoyed taking an occasional fling with a few dollars on a pony or a poker game. This was her pleasure, and she saw nothing wrong with it.

With her husband gone, the fact was that before long Harriet had lost the home in Rosedale. It was a contingency that Edward Harris had not overlooked. “If the worst should ever come to the

worst,” her husband’s words came back to her later, “you and the boys could always move into granny’s old house on Sumach Street. It’s free and clear of encumbrance, and it wouldn’t cost much to run.”

“Sumach Street!” Harriet had scoffed at the time. “Well, I hope that none of us will ever have to live out there!”

“Oh, there are worse things,” Edward had answered. “Actually, it’s quite a respectable house. It has eight rooms and a pantry off the kitchen. The verandah used to be painted blue and white. When I was a child, I used to love to go there to visit granny and play in the rose garden.”

“A rose garden?” Harriet had repeated the words with a wry smile. “Roses? In Cabbagetown?”

“Yes, Harriet, roses. Red and white.”

The roses that grew in the garden at 239 Sumach Street were an oddity in Cabbagetown. People came from blocks around to admire their strange beauty. Of course, the same people also admired the house itself, for 239 Sumach Street was no ordinary house. Standing all by itself, constructed of solid brick and encircled by a huge verandah, it was a fine house. There was no question about that. The question was what was such a house doing out here. It stood four doors north of the corner of Sumach and Oak Streets, and it was fully visible from our plate-glass window.

“Good morning, Mrs. Harris. What can I do for you today?” Mama greeted Harriet as she did everyone else, with a look of pleasant expectation.

Nodding slightly to acknowledge mama’s greeting, Harriet looked about the store appraisingly. Then she strutted to the bushel of apples, leaned over, picked one up and examined it critically. All the while papa stood by regarding her with respect. Mrs. Harris was a cash customer.

“These look nice, Mr. Siegel. Let me have two pounds.”

“Certainly.”

Harriet strutted back to the counter and took a list from her handbag. “Now let me see... to begin with, let me have a package of cornflakes.” The packaged cereals sat on the very top shelf, overhanging it rather precariously. These items were made available with the help of a long wooden pole equipped with a hook on the end. As Mrs. Harris watched with amusement, mama went through the following procedure. Taking pole in hand, mama first took aim, then she in turn pierced, jostled and finally toppled a package of corn flakes, and caught it in her arms.

“Yes, Mrs. Harris. What else?”

“A pound of tea, a half pint of cream, two pounds of sugar, two cans of peas.”

Mama quickly fetched the articles and placed them together. “Two cans of salmon... the red,” Harriet went on, and turning to papa, she enquired, “Have you any tomatoes today?”

“A few,” replied papa. “Hothouse at this time of year.”

“How much are they?”

“Twenty-nine cents a pound.”

“I’ll take a pound.”

“Thank you.”

Papa weighed the tomatoes, put them into a bag and placed it carefully alongside the rest of Mrs. Harris’s order. At this point, first consulting his watch, papa walked up the steps into the kitchen and returned wearing his coat and winter cap. “I’m going to make the deliveries, Rachel,” he said. “It’s after eleven o’clock already.”

“Will there be anything else today, Mrs. Harris?” said mama.

“No, thank you. Just add it up, Mrs. Siegel.”

Her order complete, Harriet stood with a ten-dollar bill ready in her hand. Mama punched the amount on the cash register, and counted the change into Harriet’s palm. “Thank you very much, Mrs. Harris.”

As yet, Harriet had made no move to leave. Evidently she was in the mood to chat a little. “How are Annie and the baby getting along, Mrs. Siegel?” she enquired.

“Oh, they’re both just fine!” mama replied. “Last night my Annie phoned me long-distance from the hospital! Can you imagine that?”

“Are you going to be able to get away to see them at all?”

“Oh, of course. When the weather gets warmer, I’m planning to go for a whole week!”

“How will you manage that?”

“Mr. Siegel will be all right. Of course, Sophie will have to staying home from school to helping him.”

“Sophie won’t like that, will she?”

“No, but she understands that there is no other way.”

Harriet nodded. “Is the fare up there very costly?”

“It’s enough,” said mama. “It’s pretty far, you know. Three hundred and forty miles. All north. But my husband says we can manage that. I’ll tell you the truth, Mrs. Harris. Actually, my problem is what to wearing for the trip.” From her apron pocket mama now took the newspaper clipping that I had cut out for her and showed it to Harriet. “You see that suit? In a suit like that, a person could take a trip in style.”

“It looks nice,” said Harriet, glancing at the sketch.

“You know, Mrs. Harris, confidentially, I have always felt that for travelling, a suit is the only thing.”

“Then why don’t you buy it, Mrs. Siegel?”

“Well,” said mama, furrowing her brow, “now that I come to think about it... a suit... it would need accessories... a blouse, shoes, a purse for sure, a pair of gloves. A whole matching outfit.”

“Of course.”

“So according to that... it would run me... by my figures... a conservative estimate... at least a hundred and twenty-five dollars.”

“So what’s wrong with that?”

“Well,” mama was stalling as best she could. “You know how it is...” She was by now feeling distinctly uncomfortable, for she had divulged more to Mrs. Harris than she had intended.

“You mean that you haven’t got the money, don’t you, Mrs. Siegel?” Harriet observed, and she added, “People who work as hard as you and your husband should be in a better financial position. And if you didn’t give credit to so many deadbeats, you would be!”

“Mrs. Harris, what are you saying? Most of the people here are on relief, and the others are all struggling. What could we do?”

“They’re a pack of good-for-nothings,” Harriet held forth, “and they wouldn’t pay you, even if they had the money.”

“Well, I don’t feel that way,” mama protested. “I don’t feel that way at all! If they had the money, they would pay. I have faith in people, and besides, these people are my friends!”

Harriet sniffed. “You’re too soft hearted, Mrs. Siegel. You should think of yourself more. Be more selfish!”

Mama blinked. This time Harriet had struck a chord. “That’s what my husband is always telling me.”

“Well, he’s right,” said Harriet. “Believe me, the best friend you have is a dollar. I’ve found that out.”

But mama shook her head. “No, Mrs. Harris, I could never live like that. I believe that we should all help one another.”

As she so often did, mama recounted this conversation to me later, and I could imagine the sincerity glistening in her eyes when she said that. Moreover, mama must have gazed at Mrs. Harris for a long time, until Harriet softened; for the next time she spoke, it was in a changed tone of voice. “Mrs. Siegel,” she said, “do you remember my brown suit?”

“The one with the fur trim?”

“That’s the one.”

“Oh, of course I do.”

“You know, Mrs. Siegel, that suit would fit you. Except for our height, we are just about the same size.”

“Yes, I would say so,” agreed mama.

“I’ve grown tired of that suit,” Harriet went on. “And anyway I’ve ordered myself a new one for Easter this year. Grey this time. Grey with a little pinstripe in it.”

“Oh, good for you, Mrs. Harris!”

“My sons insisted I get it.”

“They’re very good boys.”

“Oh nonsense!” replied Harriet. “They both make good salaries. Why shouldn’t they buy their mother a new suit once in a while?”

“I don’t say not,” mama was quick to get her reply in, “but you are very fortunate just the same, Mrs. Harris.”

“Do you know what I’m going to do, Mrs. Siegel? I’m going to let you have that brown suit. It would be just the thing for your trip.”

Mama’s eyes opened wide, and her voice rose. “Do you really mean it? How much would you ask me for it?”

Harriet smiled. “Don’t worry. I’ll give you a good deal. I’ll let you have it for, say, fifteen dollars.”

“That’s very fair,” mama said. “I’ll have to ask my husband first, but I’m pretty sure it will be all right.”

Harriet nodded. “You understand that I can’t let you have it until I get my new one? I can’t afford to leave myself short. And I’m only doing this because I like you, Mrs. Siegel, and I’d like to help you out of the spot you’re in.”

“That’s very considerate of you,” mama smiled. “And by all means you keep it until you get your new one. I won’t be needing it for five or six weeks anyhow.”

Harriet adjusted her collar and now gathered up her bag of groceries.

“Incidentally, Mrs. Harris,” said mama, “when our grandson is a month old, my husband and I we will be making a little party for him. And we would like to having you and your sons come to it.”

“Thank you,” said Harriet. “But why are you waiting so long to have a party?”

“Because that’s when we’ll be celebrating his *Pidyan Haben?*” replied mama. Harriet grimaced a little, and mama realized that she had confused her. “Maybe I better explain you, Mrs. Harris,” mama said then, and first taking a deep breath, she started in. “My father explained me when I was a little girl. You see, in olden times there were three classes of Jews. One were the *Kohens*—the high priests. These Jews were the descendants of Aaron, supposed to be. Then there were the *Levis*. They were middle-class people. And this left only the *Yisroels*—the common people. If the first child of an Yisroel happened to be a boy, he belonged to the Kohens, so they could training him in the temple.

“I see,” said Harriet. “That’s very interesting,” and she now made a motion to leave.

But mama poked a finger in the air. “Just a minute! The child’s parents had a privilege. If they wanted to keeping him home so he could help his father with the work or maybe train him for something else, they could buying him back when he was one month old. If they paid for him. Not much, just a little something.”

“Yes, yes, I understand,” said Harriet a little impatiently. “You mean that if the parents wished to have the child released from his priestly obligations, they could redeem him from the high priests for the consideration of a token gift.”

Mama regarded Harriet respectfully. “That’s right, Mrs. Harris. You said it just right.”

“And this custom is carried on to this day, you say?”

“Yes, among Orthodox Jews. And our son-in-law, he happens to be both Orthodox and an Yisroel. So all he has to do is to asking a friend who is a Kohen to making a little ceremony. He will pay five silver dollars and the friend will then make a speech and say that the child belongs to his parents.”

“In other words,” Harriet sighed wearily, “in this way the child is released from his priestly obligations, and the parents may bring him up as they see fit.”

Mama nodded. “Of course, the actual ceremony will be in my daughter’s home up north, but we are celebrating it here at the same time.”

“My sons and I will be glad to come,” said Harriet politely.

Now ready to release her captive, mama accompanied Harriet to the front door, and looked sincerely into her eyes. “And thank you again about the suit, Mrs. Harris. You have solved my whole problem.”

An Evening at Home

Business hours in our store were from seven to seven. Saturdays they were extended to midnight, but all through the week papa closed up promptly. Whereas during the day mama and papa would snatch a bowl of soup or a cup of coffee on the run, after the store was closed we would all sit down to a meal together. Then after I washed the dishes and the kitchen was tidy again, our evening was free for some family life, for homework, a little visiting perhaps, and to catch up on our chores.

That evening I had something on my mind. I remember thinking about it as I was finishing the dishes, drying the last few and putting them away, while over at the table mama was sprinkling clothes. On the floor beside mama there was a hamper of fresh laundry and in her hand she held a bottle of water with an attached sprinkler. My schoolbooks were stacked on one end of the table and, at the other, papa sat relaxing after the evening meal. In front of him papa had placed a glass tumbler of red tea, a package of bulk tobacco and a booklet of cigarette papers. Between his teeth he held a cube of sugar. As he sipped tea, Russian style, papa was rolling himself a supply of cigarettes.

My problem concerned a subject that was giving me an inordinate amount of trouble at school. I simply could not master Chemistry, and to make matters worse, my teacher had taken to ridiculing me about it. By now I had quite made up my mind. I would give the subject up. Still, I was apprehensive about telling mama.

“You know what I think, mama?” I said suddenly.

“How should I know what you think?”

“I think I’ll drop Chemistry.”

“I don’t want you should drop nothing.”

Mama’s comment, although not too surprising, was the last straw.” I knew it! I knew you’d say that!” I cried, “but it’s no use! I don’t understand it! I have a mental block! I can’t get the formulas, I mean formulae, straight! And there’s no use spending time on it, good valuable time that I could be spending on subjects that I’m good in!”

“Shah, shah!” said mama, holding up a hand. “What are you flying off the handle? Mental block, formulas, formulae, a whole *megillah*. I don’t like the sound of this, Sophie! Not a bit!”

“Sure, it’s easy for you to talk,” I wailed, “but what else can I do?”

“Well,” mama reasoned, “you say yourself that in some subjects you’re good.”

“That’s right.”

“So in those subjects you might get recommended?”

“I guess so.”

“So let’s be sensible. For now, hang on to everything. Then after you’ll be recommended in the other subjects, you’ll have time to studying the Chemistry.” She thought for a moment. “What do you call those examinations where you pay a dollar fifty to try?”

“Departmental.”

“That’s right. When the time comes, I’ll give you the dollar fifty and you’ll try Chemistry.”

“But I’ll fail!” My exasperation was increasing by the minute.

“You won’t fail!”

“I will!”

“I’m willing to gamble the dollar fifty on you,” mama volunteered. I should have known better, of course. No child of my mother would be allowed to accept defeat so easily. “But mama, that’s not the idea,” I tried to explain. “I’m behind the class!”

“I’ll still take a chance on the dollar fifty,” said mama.

By now I felt like a person screaming in a vacant room. “There’s more involved here than the dollar fifty!”

“What’s the matter with you, Sophie? Why all of a sudden are you throwing in the towel?”

At this point papa turned expressive eyes towards me. Papa knew how stubbornly mama could stand her ground when a principle was involved. Not for a moment would she waver. Not an inch would she budge. Papa used to say that a hundred years should first go by, but when mama’s time came and the *malochamovis* himself tapped her on the shoulder, she would turn around and give him an argument. “Take my advice, Sophie,” he sighed, “try the examination.”

“All right, I will! I’ll try the examination!”

“Well, I must say that’s better.” Mama looked about indignantly and then she returned to sprinkling clothes.

The tempest in our teacup having subsided, papa scooped the loose shreds of tobacco from the table onto a tiny sheet of the translucent paper, and rolled himself a final cigarette. Then placing his supply carefully into the empty tobacco container, he stood up. “Maybe I should better candle the eggs now, Rachel, so I could put them out tomorrow,” he said.

“That’s a good idea, Elia,” said mama, and glancing at me warily, she made the following announcement: “While I’m cutting out aprons, Sophie is going to iron.”

I gave a start. “Aw, mama! I have so much homework and I still have to enter the bills!”

“First ironing,” replied mama, “then bills, then homework.”

“Aw, mama, I’ll never get through tonight!”

“You start, and we’ll taking turns?” mama compromised, and threw in the benefit of her most charming smile.

Sighing from the bottom of my lungs and dragging my feet, I walked to the door that stood open between the kitchen and the hall. Behind the door stood the ironing board. Folded. This relic was a model long since discarded by average housewives. In fact, it was probably the only such ironing board left in existence. It was an antiquated contraption, consisting of a board and three wooden

legs of different sizes. To this day I don't really know, but I think the idea was to fit one leg through a slot in another. But there were slots in all three legs, which made it all very untrustworthy. Mama and I shared the identical blind spot when it came to assembling the ironing board. We were also very poor ironers.

I dragged the board to the centre of the kitchen, dumped it on the floor and undid the legs, so that it lay on its back with all the legs up. Immediately, one leg fell in, Mama gave it a shifty look and, putting down the bottle, she walked over to help. She knelt down, picked up the leg that fell in and held it. "All right," she said. "I'll hold this one. You grab the other two."

Luckily all thumbs and fingers were cleared, because as I attempted to follow mama's instructions, the ironing board gave a sudden jerk. Together we turned it right side up, so that mama had her whole arm around one end, I had my arm around the other, and only one leg was standing. I knelt down to pull out the two collapsed legs and the first one buckled under. Mama and I stood regarding our enemy. Then we looked rather frantically into each other's eyes.

"Sophie?"

"Yes, mama?"

"Go get Mrs. Badgeley."

Our Bookkeeping System

Tonight Christina was wearing her brown dress under her black coat. From under her kerchief several wisps of hair were sticking out in different directions. "Here I am, Mrs. Siegel", she cried cheerfully. With a knowing smile, she hurried in, placed her Bible on the table and assembled the ironing board without any trouble. She then hung her things on the back of the door, connected the iron and smoothed out the first piece of laundry.

I was now free to follow my usual routine. While Christina ironed away and mama cut out aprons, I went into the darkened store and brought back a thick black notebook and a large hook on which hung many loose sheets of paper. I seated myself at the table and proceeded to enter the bills. First consulting the sheets on the hook, I made entries in the notebook. I worked swiftly. Now and then my finger would remain poised above a mark that puzzled me, and at such times mama would come to my assistance. But for the most part I understood.

I was transcribing. In my clear handwriting I was transcribing into the credit book the hieroglyphics that my parents had drawn during the day. Because they were both illiterate, mama and papa had a system of shorthand intelligible only within our family circle. At the top of each sheet they wrote the street number of the customer. After that, each item was simply represented by a symbol with the price marked beside it. A can of soup was indicated by a spoon drawn hastily... a long handle and a shallow bowl. A can of peas was three small circles, and potatoes three large ones, with a five or ten drawn through them to indicate the poundage. Ketchup was a tall bottle with a smudge, and a fish meant salmon. (Incidentally, mama's fish always had an eye, while papa's were

to remain eternally blind). A bag of charcoal was easy. A beer jug meant malt. And so it went.

Every evening it was my duty, as it had been my sister Annie's before me, to enter the bills. I also wrote letters and made out cheques. Many was the time when I stood with my finger pointing to 'the line', while papa nervously scrawled his signature.

They could write figures. And they could reckon. Oh, how mama and papa could reckon! They could add, subtract, multiply and divide so swiftly and accurately that I often suspected them of being a mathematical witch and wizard. Mama could add a three-figured column and come up with the correct answer in half the time it took me. And what was more, she did it in her head, without a pencil. Mentally she added the hundreds, next the tens, etcetera. Papa, one of a family of nine children, grew up on a tenant farm in Lithuania where the son of a poor farmer did not usually attend school. Mama was born in a small town in the south of Poland. The eldest daughter of a struggling tailor, as a child mama stayed at home and helped her father baste and trim the garments. When her parents died, mama and her brother and sister moved to their aunt's home in Vienna. Here, while the younger children attended school, mama at fifteen went to work in a factory to help support the household.

When the bills were entered and out of the way, I turned my attention to my schoolwork. Settling down with my books, pen and bottle of ink, I was only half aware of mama and Mrs. Badgeley, and the conversation between them.

"Is there any improvement in him, Mrs. Badgeley?"

"In Mr. Suede? I'm afraid not, Mrs. Siegel."

"Did he eat anything today?"

"Just a little. Not very much."

"He don't eat enough!"

"I know. That's what I told him. And he upsets himself so about the news."

"The news?" Mama repeated the word.

Although Christina herself did almost no reading outside of her Bible, and although she seldom listened to a newscast, she had superficially absorbed some of her boarder's views on current events. "Do you know what them Germans went and done, Mrs. Siegel?" she said now.

"No, what?" asked mama.

"They went and made a rule in Germany that no Jewish people can hold a public office. That leader of theirs, the paperhanger fellow, what's it they call him now? The 'fuehrer,' that's it. Well, he was the one at the head of it."

At Christina's words, I know that mama felt an icy shudder run through her, as from the depths of her memory the word 'pogrom' echoed through her mind. Mama was aware that we were living in uneasy times. Oh, if she could only read! Her mind was full of so many questions! But surely, mama told herself, surely in this day and age, the big men, they wouldn't allow it to amount to anything! That new President in the United States, surely he wouldn't allow it to go any farther, even in a country not his own!

Some day, some day when her ship came in, mama promised herself, she would buy a radio and, like Mr. Suede, she would listen to it by the hour until she learned some answers. Oh, but it would have to be a well-laden ship, mama knew, for in 1935 radios cost anywhere from two hundred dollars up.

Suddenly Christina picked up a piece of laundry. It happened to be a shirt of papa's, just ironed, and she draped it artistically over her arm.

"That's lovely, Mrs. Badgeley," said mama with a deep sigh. Then she turned her mind to the news she had been saving up for her friend. "I have something nice to telling you, Mrs. Badgeley. I could hardly believe it, but Mrs. Harris is selling me a suit."

Christina cocked a suspicious eye in mama's direction. "Did you say Mrs. Harris?"

"Yes, Mrs. Harris, Mrs. Harris. She's selling me her brown suit!"

“Not the one with the fur collar!”

“That’s it!” Mama grew starry-eyed as she went on. “It costs sixty-five dollars originally, but she’s going to let me have it for only fifteen. Oh, I know I could easy shorten the skirt and the sleeves myself. And when I step off that train, wearing that suit, with that fur around my neck, can’t you just imagine, Mrs. Badgeley, how proud my Annie will be of me!”

Christina appeared a little starry-eyed herself. “I can picture it all,” she said, but then coming down to earth, she added: “But what does your husband have to say about it?”

“I haven’t asked him yet,” replied mama. “I’m waiting to catch him in a good mood first.”

“Well, good luck,” Christina replied skeptically. She now held up mama’s flannelette nightgown. “Did you see this?” she asked.

“Oh no! That’s very nice too, Mrs. Badgeley!”

“I’ll do Sophie’s middy now, and then I’ll read to you for a little while.”

“Will you? Thank you very much, Mrs. Badgeley. Then we’ll have our coffee.”

That night, lying snug and warm in my bed, long after I finished my homework and long after Mrs. Badgeley took her leave, I could hear the sweet clear tones of mama’s voice, as it billowed upwards from the kitchen to my room. Mama had a great love of music. A singer of songs, she possessed a repertoire that ranged from the Polish lullabies she remembered from her childhood to Yiddish ballads (like “Die Greena Cousina” and that two-hundred-year-old lullaby “Rozinkas mit Mandlen”), to that day’s popular tunes that she picked up here and there. All my life I had fallen asleep to mama’s singing—from “Wlazl Kotek na Plotek” to “Shah, Shah, der Rebbe Gent,” to “My Blue Heaven.” From “When Frances Dances with Me,” to the Strauss waltzes she had learned in Vienna—the Emperor waltz, the Kiss waltz, the Sweetheart waltz. And one other, which was my favorite of all. This was a haunting little strain that I remembered from my childhood, and which, in

the tradition of generations, mama recalled from hers. “What is the name of that little song?” I had enquired of mama when I was a very little girl.

“It has no name exactly, mammela,” mama had replied softly. “It’s just a little folk song that mothers in Vienna have sung to little boys and girls like you for years and years.”

“But it must have a little name,” I had insisted. “What should I call it?”

“Just call it ‘Viennese Melody,’” mama had answered then. Tonight mama followed “Spiz, Dziecino, Juz” with “Jakala” and two popular songs—“Annie Doesn’t Live Here Anymore” and “You Ought to be in Pictures.” Then she tapered off with the “Viennese Melody.” Outside my window the March night was full of bluster, but I was snug in my iron bed in my room over the kitchen. My mother was singing, and I was secure.

Friendship

*Jarvis now we proudly hail thee,
In the springtime of our youth,
With a promise never to fail thee
In the ways of right and truth.*

With the singing of the high school theme, the morning assembly of the Lower School was dismissed. As we filed out of the auditorium, I walked arm in arm with my best friend, Faye Baldovich. Unlike myself, Faye was a slim girl. She had sleek black hair cut short, and crescent-shaped eyebrows over large brown eyes. Like her little brother, Arala, Faye had a shrewd mind.

We were quite little girls when Faye and I first met in the store. At this encounter, we had simply stared at each other, but we soon became lively companions who spent long hours in each other's homes. Since our friendship consisted in large part of rivalry, we kept a close watch on each other. In class we occupied the second seats in rows three and four; we memorized each other's examination marks; in the pool we raced side by side; and at school socials, since the nearest either of us had to a male partner was the other, we danced together.

In the light of today's standards, it is probably impossible to believe how unsophisticated we girls were at the age of fourteen. We longed to be popular, but lacked the knack of it. Neither of us had ever been invited to a party or had had a date. Still we managed to have plenty of fun. In winter we went for long energetic walks in the snow, and gleefully hurled snowballs at each other. Sunday

afternoons we prowled about the Museum or the Art Gallery, since the admission was free.

We loved the summer holidays. We could pack a lunch and spend an afternoon at nearby Riverdale Park and visit the zoo. For the price of a car ticket we could take a ferry to Centre Island or Hanlan's Point; any day in the week we could play tether or handball at the Park schoolyard, and at baseball games there root for our old alma mater against the hated Dufferin School (with the winning team sharing a watermelon).

On a Saturday evening, often as not, we would join the audience gathered about the Salvation Army truck parked outside our store. The old truck, decorated with posters, would stop on the corner and from it would emerge the captain and a dozen 'lassies' and 'laddies' dressed in navy blue. Within the cheery circle of light shining through our plate-glass window, they would set up their headquarters and hold their open-air inspirational meeting. To the dash of the tambourines and the boom-boom of the big bass drum, Faye and I would add our voices to the others in the singing of the hymns.

But our greatest pleasure was the movies. If we found ourselves with twenty-five cents to spend, we had a choice of four movie houses on Parliament Street—the Blue Bell, the Eclipse, the Parliament and the Carlton. We got our twenty-five cents worth, for every program consisted of two, and sometimes three feature films.

We were living then in the 'golden age of Hollywood,' which presented an image to the public of unrealistic glamour and fantasy. Virtue was always rewarded, and right triumphed in every film. Faye and I accepted these values without question, and returned home inspired.

To be sure, Faye and I were very compatible. But Faye was not my only friend. My friendship with Constance Seymour went as far back as our kindergarten days at Park School. At that time, the Seymour family occupied a tiny dwelling on Virgin Place at the

foot of Sumach Street, close to the Eastern Avenue Gas Works. It was then the ambition of Constance's father to live above Queen Street. By now Hector Seymour had at least achieved this goal, for the family now lived on Sumach Place, which was even above Dundas Street.

I can still remember my very first day at Park School on Sydenham St. The kindergarten had captivating stained-glass windows depicting children at play, and to the tune of "Country Gardens" played by a red-haired teacher at the piano, we children marched in. Constance was the little girl with the sad eyes, who solemnly informed the teacher that day that she couldn't read very well yet, the little girl wearing the pale print dress with the tell-tale green piping. All cotton dresses distributed by the Salvation Army that year had green piping. Constance was the gifted child who in later grades would always be first in the class.

It was probably her poetry that first attracted me. Usually Constance brought her notebook to school, and during recess she and I would huddle together on a window ledge. We would share the bagel that mama had thoughtfully provided and Constance, with her notebook open across her knees, would read her poetry aloud as I listened in silent wonder.

When the time came for Constance to graduate from Park School, there was no question in her mind what it was she wanted to do. Constance wanted to go on to high school.

"Our fathers have more than your father," some of the neighbourhood children rebuked her, "and we can't afford to go to high school."

"You should go to a commercial school, and learn some thing practical," still others chided.

But Constance shook her head. She just had to go to high school! As things turned out, it was Miss Atmore, the Grade Eight teacher, who did something constructive for Constance. Miss Atmore wrote a letter to the Chairman of the Board of Education. After that, Constance went to high school. Her books

were supplied by the Board of Education and her school uniform and other necessities by the Big Sisters' Association. Now in her second year, Constance was still standing first.

I was fortunate in that Faye and Constance liked each other. To our knowledge, we were the only three girls in Cabbagetown who wore the Jarvis uniform. The three of us discussed our teachers at great length. And we agreed that most of them had their trademarks.

With Miss St. John, it was the tweed suits that she always wore with a man's shirt and tie.

Miss Drurie, the colourless little History teacher, had her weak sense of humour. "Now, boys and girls, let us throw a little light on the subject," she would say, her voice a monotone as she opened the drapes. "You can pass out now, class," she said as she dismissed us. Mr. Charles Booth was identifiable by his devastating charm. In fact, at Jarvis, cases of hero worship for the young Literature and Composition teacher were so prevalent that among his pupils the infection was referred to as 'Boothitis'.

Mr. Jenkins, a burly man with a shock of grey hair, taught us Algebra. His distinguishing characteristic was a booming voice, and he took a mischievous delight in startling us students with it. At the beginning of a period, he would come stamping into the classroom, jab at the air with a powerful fist, and bellow, "All together now! What should you have, written across your hearts? To which, in one mighty chorus the class would roar, "Rationalize the denominator!" If a boy, tarried in the hallway to speak with a girl, Mr. Jenkins would alarm him properly by approaching and suddenly bawling in his ear, "Is this your sister, young man?"

"What bird wrote this on the board?" he rasped. "Oh, I'm sorry, Miss Baldovich."

"Sit up, Miss Siegel!" he snarled. "You're growing corns on your shoulder blades."

“And thou, Brutus!” he groaned, holding his forehead dramatically on the occasion when Constance Seymour made an error on the blackboard.

From time to time Constance had dinner at our house and stayed on for the evening. Constance found papa rather forbidding because he was so solemn, but she adored mama. Mama, of course, recognized Constance’s great need for a mitzvah, and she got right down to business. Along with heaping portions on Constance’s plate, mama dispensed warm assurances. Life was full of possibilities, mama said, and Constance was going to be an educated girl, was she not? She made our sad-eyed guest feel that the future was certain to be better for her than the present.

Constance expected very little from her own mother. She knew that her mother had not been right for some time now and that her illness was in her mind. For her mother Constance possessed a deep reservoir of pity.

Faye Baldovich envied me because my mother and I were so well attuned to each other, whereas between Faye and her mother what existed was more like continual unarmed warfare. Indeed, to my recollection, mama and I had quarrelled only once. On that occasion I left the store in a huff and spent the afternoon at Constance’s house on Sumach Place. But by evening, when my anger had disappeared, I was conscious only of a distressing upheaval in my breast. Then on my way home from Constance’s house, I caught sight of mama walking up Sumach Street. She had left papa alone in the store and was looking for me.

We fell into each other’s arms. “Don’t do that no more!” mama admonished me, drawing me close and encircling me in her strong arms. “Promise your mama you won’t never do that no more!” With my head nestled gratefully against mama’s ample

bosom and reassured by the scent of her warm flesh, I was only too glad to promise.

Social Climbers

If there was something lacking in our social life, it wasn't as if Faye and I didn't try. When the opportunity presented itself, it wasn't as if we didn't make an honest stab at broadening our horizons. Just six months before, as a matter of fact, we had jointly applied for membership in the Sweet Teens Jewish Girls' Social Club. It all came about rather unexpectedly and, of course, no one could have foreseen the outcome.

One Monday afternoon after classes, the two of us were standing at our lockers in the hall, gathering together our belongings when we were approached by Reva Silver. Surprised and not a little honoured, for Reva was a sophisticated third-former at least fifteen years old, Faye and I glanced quickly at each other and then, round-eyed, turned to gawk at our caller.

Reva Silver was a swanky dresser. Today she was wearing a twin sweater set and a tweed skirt with side slits at the hem, and brogues on her feet. She wore lipstick to school, and she sported a clashing, freshly permanented 'feather cut.' In addition to all this, discreet whispers had reached our ears that Reva had been seen smoking in the lunch room on Carleton Street where certain middle and upper school students met. And here, lo and behold, this paragon had searched us out and was addressing us!

"The Sweet Teens have twelve members now," Reva spoke breezily, her painted lips forming a beguiling red bow over her even teeth. "And we've decided to increase our membership to eighteen. So if you kids are interested, just put on your glad rags and meet me there on Sunday at two o'clock. I'll sponsor you myself."

Speechless with admiration, Faye and I nodded our heads. "Then I'll see you both there? The dues are fifteen cents a week, and you have to bring three weeks' in advance towards our next social. You do know how to get there, don't you? Just take a Carleton car and get off at College and Spadina. The clubroom's in the building with the bank. Second floor, to the right." Once more Reva treated us to her beguiling smile. Then she was gone.

That week Faye and I worked fast. This was our golden opportunity, we knew, and frantic to create a good impression with the remaining eleven members of the Sweet Teens, we made feverish plans to improve our personal appearance. To begin with, we each bought a tube of lipstick and practised using it in our spare time. Then we made an appointment at Violetta's Beauty Shoppe on Gerrard Street for a permanent. (Violetta, as it happened, was featuring a Dollar Special that week.) Next, Faye had to muster all her experience as a warrior to overcome her mother's strong feelings against the three weeks' dues to be paid in advance.

Finally, we tackled the problem of what to wear for our debut into society. It didn't take Faye long to make up her mind. She would wear her good skirt, the blue with the patch pockets. And her sister-in-law promised to lend her a white blouse with puff sleeves. I didn't have a good skirt this year, and so I decided upon the dress that my sister Annie had included in her most recent parcel of hand-me-downs. This dress, as mama had pointed out, was made of a good silk crepe and was no more than two years old. But it was black, not the best colour for my olive skin; besides, since I was considerably taller and rounder than my sister, and even though mama had carefully taken down the hem and let out the seams, once in the dress I protruded rather noticeably in spots.

Throwing herself into the spirit of it all, mama was quick to place a telephone order for a pair of silk stockings for me. Then mama and I put our heads together and decided that since I seldom wore high heels, it was not practical to go to the expense of buying them. A pair of shoes from the store would serve the purpose. The

shoes mama found for me, she explained, were a sort of a pump and they had originally sold for \$3. 59 a pair, but due to slight imperfections had been cleared in Baton's Bargain Basement for 98¢.

The slight imperfection in my shoes, as it turned out, was that the pair consisted of two different sizes. One was size seven and the other nine. Since I took size eight, the left shoe pinched and the right one felt loose. At mama's insistence, I grudgingly admitted that probably nobody would notice and that for one day I could put up with such a small discomfort.

But in the Baldovich household there was trouble again. For Faye had set her heart upon a brand new pair of black pumps, and she was prepared to do battle for them.

"Beh! Are you crazy or are you making yourself crazy?" snorted the indignant Mrs. Baldovich. "By Mrs. Siegel is brand new boots!"

"No, they're not!" Faye screeched. "Maybe nobody has ever worn them before, but that doesn't mean they're new! Some of those *shmatals* have been there for ten years!" And she added, exaggerating a little, "Some of them even have high buttons on them!"

"Meh!" moaned Mrs. Baldovich. "Where should I get five dollars to buy you boots?"

"They're not boots, ma, they're shoes! And I don't care, I don't care! A girl my age is entitled to a decent pair of shoes once in her life!" Faye carried on at such length and with such fire about the rights of a girl her age that eventually she wore down her mother's resistance. Finally Mrs. Baldovich succumbed, and instructed her daughter to go and buy and send up the boots C.O.D.

The next day after school, we set out for Baton's and Faye, with the taste of triumph still sweet on her lips, purchased a pair of shiny black pumps with narrow high heels for \$4. 98, and sent them home C.O.D. But when the parcel was delivered at her door, Mrs. Baldovich refused to accept it, and the driver took the shoes

back. Shortly after that, a chastened Faye bought a pair of brown cuban-heeled shoes with a tie, from Siegel's Groceteria.

When Saturday came round, we got our permanents. Perhaps it was because Violetta herself was away that day and the new operator allowed us to sit under the machine too long, or maybe it was only the solution used in the Dollar Special. In any case, the results were comical to behold. For when we left the shop, our hair bore not the remotest resemblance to the feather cut we had requested, but stuck out all over our heads in frizzled corkscrews, reminiscent of Hottentots. Nor was there anything we could hope to do. All the new operator could suggest was that we wait six months, until our hair grew, then cut off the permanent and get a short haircut.

On Sunday when Faye and I arrived, all the members were already there. The clubroom was large. It had a high ceiling and a polished hardwood floor, a Victrola in one corner, two couches, several straight-backed chairs and two folding card tables. A few of the girls were relaxing on the couches; two or three sat at the tables, shuffling cards; but for the most part they stood about the room, smoking and generally exercising their charm. All wore high heels and figure-hugging dresses or skirts. Their lips were painted, their nails lacquered, and without exception their hair was styled in fashionable 'feather-cuts' or 'wind-blowns'. To Faye and me they appeared an extremely charming group, sophisticated and swanky.

Before the meeting began, Reva ushered us about the room in order to acquaint us with the other girls. With each successive introduction Faye and I glanced sharply at each other, for it seemed to us that every girl in turn blinked, opened her eyes wide, and the smile on her face froze somehow. Then, after the meeting was called to order and the minutes read, Faye and I were officially presented by our sponsor, and each of us was called upon to make a little

speech. With our tongues stumbling over the words, first Faye and then I stated our qualifications (each of us rather superfluously including our most recent examination marks), and told why we felt we should belong to the club. After that, we were asked to wait outside in the hall for the verdict.

On two of the straight-backed chairs, Faye and I sat rather forlornly staring about the dark hall. “Didn’t you think they looked at us funny?” remarked Faye, eyeing me obliquely. “I mean, all that blinking and everything.”

“Oh, that’s because they’re so advanced for their age,” I replied. “They want to look theatrical, so they blink and then they make their eyes big.”

We could tell from the sounds coming through the closed door that there was plenty of activity going on inside the clubroom. Talking, followed by ‘shushing,’ and here and there a sharp cackle of laughter. We couldn’t make out too many words, but a few of them reached our ears intact: “obnoxious”... “Halloween”... and at one point Reva’s voice: “gym uniforms.” It was all very confusing, and it seemed a long time before Reva made her appearance in the hall.

I could tell right away that Reva felt bad. In fact, when she first came out, I felt my heart sink. She looked a little pale, and for a moment or two, perhaps on account of the naked hope trembling on our faces, Reva shuddered. “Gee, kids, I don’t know how to tell you this. I mean, in a way I guess it’s all my fault, because I did ask you.”

I think I spoke steadily enough. “What’s the matter, Reva?”

“Well, heck!” stammered Reva. “This sure is embarrassing. And I sure am sorry and all that. But it looks like you kids have been black-balled.”

“What did they say was the matter with us?” I asked, wincing only a little.

“Well, nothing really,” Reva fibbed. “It was just the general opinion that you kids are a little too young for our club.”

“Is that all?”

“Well, yes. Although a few of the girls did say that you both seemed a bit gauche.”

“Maybe they didn’t like us telling them all those marks,” Faye volunteered.

“That didn’t exactly go over either,” Reva admitted, placing a solicitous hand to her cheek. Then turning to the door, she shaped her red lips into a weak smile, and added, “Just wait here, kids, will you? I’ll bring your coats out.”

“I think it was our marks,” said Faye, as we trudged gloomily along College Street. “They just don’t want anybody in their club who’s smarter than them.”

“I’d say you’re right, Faye,” I replied. “They wouldn’t want to be shown up by the intellectual type.”

“They said we were gauche,” said Faye, risking a glance in my direction. “What do you suppose that means?”

“I don’t know, but I don’t like the sound of it either.”

However, the afternoon was not a complete loss for us. As we walked along, we were fast becoming conscious of an alluring fragrance, and picking up the scent, we followed it until we stood side by side in front of Becker’s Delicatessen. For only one brief moment did we hesitate. Then, glancing at each other, we nodded in unison, for the thought had struck us simultaneously. In our coat pockets we still had the three weeks’ dues in advance—forty-five cents each, which, we were fully aware, was enough for a hot pastrami on rye, a frankfurter and a Coke apiece. And a dill pickle between us.

Mama

You know, Sophie,” mama would say, “my father was only a poor tailor, but I had a happy childhood.”

I suppose, when you come right down to it, mama was a product of her early environment. If you were familiar with her antecedents, it was easy enough to understand her sense of values. Where mama came from, beautiful trusting souls were not the exception. Malapofska was a little Polish town near the Hungarian border. Mama would often speak to me of her childhood, how as a little girl of seven or eight, while the younger children played outside, she would help her father with his sewing and her mother with the housework; how her father and mother always sang at their work; and how they were all such good friends with their neighbours and the Polish peasants that they never even thought of locking their door at night.

“You know, Sophie,” mama told me. “I was only fifteen when I had lost both my parents and we children moved to our auntie’s house in Vienna. “And believe me, when we moved into their little house, it was plenty crowded, but they were very kind. They were a poor family themselves, but they did everything they could for us. Auntie Channa and Uncle Benjamin and my three cousins, Harry, Joe and Meyer. And we had a good time, too, all of us together, singing and dancing. Sometimes we would pack a lunch and go on a picnic.”

Mama would smile indulgently as her thoughts took her back to the four years she spent at her aunt’s house in Vienna. “Do you know what cousin Harry did to me one time? It was on my sixteenth birthday, and he dunked me in the river. He did it for a joke, you understand, but when I came back to the house I was

soaking wet and Auntie Channa scolded Harry, because she was afraid I would get sick.”

“Did you get sick, Mama?”

“No, I never got sick. But we always enjoyed ourselves.”

Mama’s capacity for enjoyment was far-reaching. To begin with, I think mama enjoyed just being alive. She took pleasure in music; with her songs echoing in my mind, I could attest to that. Mama was fortunate enough to enjoy robust good health, a clear mind and a fine appetite. Certainly mama was living proof of the enjoyment of food. Her cooking and baking were well known in the district. She was a happy mother. She made it clear to my sister Annie and me that we enriched her life, and she had an enviable, although quite separate relationship with each of us. Mama was also proud of papa. On the few occasions when they went out together socially, she took a marked pleasure in her husband’s handsome presence at her side. Standing with her arm linked in his, she would beam as she introduced him to acquaintances as her Mister.

And then again there were people. Young people, old people, of every shape and size, from every country and walk of life, mama enjoyed them all. Like the popular singer Al Jolson, mama loved faces. She never took a person for granted. On the contrary, it was her practice to treat everyone who crossed her path with great politeness, like a guest. For example, although the mail that he brought was oftentimes unwelcome—consisting for the most part of bills — still mama thanked the postman for his trouble. All public servants received the same consideration from her.

Streetcar conductors were no exception. Every Sunday afternoon mama would board the Harbord streetcar in order to visit her sister Esther, who lived in the west end of the city. First filling a shopping bag with cookies, apples, and candy for Esther’s numerous children, and an apron or a dish towel for her sister, mama would set off.

It was on her return from one of these Sunday afternoon excursions that she chanced to meet me on the streetcar.

Mama had boarded the car and was just greeting the motorman when she spotted me. Immediately her face lit up. She walked through the car and returned with me firmly in tow, bent upon introducing me to the motorman. "This is my daughter," she announced in a loud cheerful voice.

"Hello, young lady," said the motorman, with a smile. He obviously liked this Jewish woman with the shopping bag, who was always so appreciative of his services.

Frightfully ill-at-ease, I smiled painfully and slouched down as low as I could.

"It's a fine thing," mama observed to all within earshot, "to finding a daughter on a streetcar." Then I felt her hand as it descended upon my back. "Straighten up, Sophie!" Now holding me resolutely by the arm, mama walked over to the ticket-collector's cubicle, purchased four tickets for a quarter, deposited one in the fare box, and finally steered me to two vacant seats on the polished U-shaped bench that ran the length of the car. As we sat down together, the glow of pride was still on mama's face.

"Why is she so proud of me?" I wondered, in my embarrassment. Since I felt myself lacking in so many ways, I often wondered this. But as I grew older I often found myself making an effort to live up to mama's high opinion of me.

It was true, of course, that mama and papa had other differences of opinion, but it was money that was the subject of their constant rasping quarrels. They would confront each other angrily from the opposite side of the gulf between them, the gulf created by mama's open hand and papa's closed fist. It was a gulf that in twenty-five years of marriage they had not been able to bridge.

For her part, mama would have liked to have money. Certainly she wanted many of the things that money could buy, and she always worked hard in an effort to make it. She believed in putting money to good use, but she considered it unwise to worry over it too much. And unlike papa, it caused her no pain whatever to part with it.

Papa, on the other hand, was a very careful person with a dollar, and even with a nickel. Oh, with what determination and self-deprivation had papa managed to save a thousand dollars from his earnings at the factory for the down payment on the 'corner,' the grocery store and the living quarters behind it! And how heavy a load on his shoulders was the twenty-five hundred dollar mortgage still outstanding on the property! With such a slight margin between the money coming in and going out, it required papa's constant watchfulness to keep the business solvent. He strived to keep his credit good. Whenever he telephoned a supply house like York Trading or Wilkins Smallware, it was a source of deep satisfaction to papa that they never hesitated to send an order out on credit to Siegel's Groceteria. They knew that his credit was good. However, mama contended that if papa would be less rigid about credit, their life would be easier. And pleasanter too.

Papa was a man who took meticulous care of his personal possessions. Each night upon retiring he wound his watch and placed it carefully on the bureau. Then he arranged his sweater and vest on hangers and hung them alongside his good grey suit. On another hanger he hung his shirt. He said that he was not one of those dissipated individuals who changed a shirt every day. Indeed, he managed to get three or even four days' wear out of a shirt. Too much laundering, he felt, wore out the fabric and twisted it somehow. His two ties he alternated every other day, and his blue cardigan had already seen six winters' wear. But it was still good, you understand! As good as the clay mama had finished knitting it for him. Yes, papa wore his clothes indefinitely, and he never threw anything away. "You can always throw it away later," he would say.

“You can always throw it away later.” For he had very little patience with waste of any kind. An electric light left on in a vacant room was to him unforgivable. “The Hydro Company is not hard up,” was his viewpoint. “They do not need our charity.”

While he heartily enjoyed the delicious food set before him, papa nevertheless considered mama wasteful in the kitchen. Mama always cooked as though she expected company and, in point of fact, the company often did arrive. Any remote aunt, uncle or forty-second cousin visiting Toronto managed almost miraculously to find the way to us. And always, it seemed to papa, in time to eat.

“What are you worried? Take it easy,” mama would say. But papa was not the man to take it easy.

“What are you *mizzuble*? Don’t let it spoil a good night’s sleep,” she would advise him. But it often did.

Papa had much on his mind to keep him awake nights. The mortgage, the unpaid bills, the unemployment of his customers; a brand new concept—chainstore groceterias, where the customer paid only cash and with whose prices he could never hope to compete. And most worrisome of all, what if one of the family should get sick. And, heaven help him, require hospitalization. Such a turn of events would wipe papa out completely. With such thoughts keeping the fires of his insecurity ablaze, papa slept fitfully and awoke before dawn. With his mind turning this way and that, worrying, planning, he was aware of mama’s quiet breathing as she slept peacefully at his side. And how he envied her *tava!*

He was aware that he was no match for mama. He did not have her set of nerves. If the truth were known, he was often discouraged in the face of mama’s optimism. He was only a solemn man with little imagination and an irritable disposition. And he had small capacity for *narishkaten* of any kind. To him a spade was a spade, and an unpaid bill was inevitably followed by a statement at the end of the month.

Unfortunately, the door to mama’s simple pleasures appeared all closed to papa. Nor for that matter, did he share her trust in people. On the contrary, he was skeptical of others and quick to spot a flaw.

“For heaven’s sake, Elia, stop worrying! We’ll manage,” mama would scold. But I know that for papa it was not enough simply to manage. What he wanted was to get ahead. To amount to something! For upon looking back on his life, I think that papa had drawn his own conclusion about it. It was a conclusion that he would perhaps not voice to mama, but privately papa suspected that he was a failure. A failure living among other failures.

Why, he would brood, was he here among the failures of this world? It was easy enough to figure out why the others were here. Papa would make a little game out of it. He would choose a few of his neighbours at random and analyze them. Take mama’s good friend, Mrs. Badgeley, for instance. Mrs. Badgeley was here because she was a widow with no head for business. And that boarder of hers, Paul Suede, quite clearly a well educated man from a fine family, he was here because he was an alcoholic. Then take Mrs. Harris across the street. That woman had a high opinion of herself, but the truth was that she had squandered her husband’s estate. And then again, that painter fellow, Frank Gady—the one with the slovenly wife and the half dozen children—this man had never taken up a solid trade, but played at the painting all his life, like a child.

But why was he here, papa asked himself. Why, in spite of all his efforts and mama’s, had he failed to make the grade? His illiteracy? Papa was hard on himself. Other people had succeeded in spite of illiteracy. The Depression? Even during the Depression there were those who made good livings. Could it be that he was a *schlimazel* altogether? A man with his potential? Papa had to shake his head. Then why?

“Why don’t you look at what you have, instead of what you haven’t got?” mama would scold. Mama always enjoyed what she had.

Have you forgotten who you are?" she would chide. "Jews were slaves in the land of Egypt." Mama recalled a certain sermon at the synagogue.

"Would you prefer to live in a ghetto?" she would admonish him. "The way I see it, you should be grateful to be living here." She herself was very grateful.

Papa would always think over what mama said, and he would nod his head. Yes, mama was right. And if she was right, why then did he feel so rotten? Usually papa would answer with a deep sigh. "Rachel, how I wish I had your *tava*."

Papa

Mama confided in me that as far back as their courtship days, she had been aware that papa hated to spend money. She noticed that he never treated her to a restaurant meal like other young men treated their fiancées, and that he seldom bought her a gift. But in her younger days mama had considered it rather a virtue in her serious grey-eyed suitor that he counted every penny. She understood how much he hated being in debt and that he strove constantly to get ahead. She did not know then that this trait in him, his thrift, would one day become the source of such bitter friction between them.

It was a bleak boyhood that papa spent in Lithuania. One of nine children, his family were tenant farmers who worked the land for little more than subsistence. Papa had only a graceless desultory upbringing to look back on, and now he was not close with his brothers and sisters, who were scattered far and wide all over the world.

For the first fourteen or fifteen years of his life, papa had scarcely been farther than the village surrounded by the ten ant farms. But when he was a youth of sixteen, his father took him to the fine home of their landlord, for word had spread among the tenant farmers that the landlord wished to employ a stable boy. Papa was physically very strong, with a thick chest and shoulders, and the landlord chose him over the other applicants. He agreed to hire papa for the period of one year, at the end of which time

papa was to receive the sum of fifteen rubles in payment for his services.

That year papa served his master well. His food was the leftovers from the servants' table, and his bed was the moldy hay of the stable. But papa was of good cheer. Diligently he tended the horses and looked forward to the day when at long last he would receive his wages. The long awaited day, however, was to breed a harsh resentment in him, for when it finally arrived and papa, wearing his ostler's clothes, humbly presented himself before the landlord, he was rudely informed that his father had been there the day before and collected the fifteen rubles.

Shortly after that, papa emigrated to Canada. Around the turn of the century, Canada was very sparsely populated, and immigration from the European countries was encouraged. Papa joined a group of young able-bodied men who, sponsored by a Canadian Railway Company, were provided with free passage to Canada.

It was a memorable trip. At the Lithuanian port of Klaipeda, the recruits embarked. Once aboard ship, they were given passports and supplied with food for the duration of the long voyage across the Baltic and the North Sea, until the ship reached Liverpool. Here the ship docked for a stopover. The men were dismissed and told to return in four days' time, when the ship would set sail for Canada. No provision was made for the would-be immigrants for the days that they were to spend in Liverpool. Papa, a youth of seventeen, was uncouth and illiterate, and he could speak no English. Furthermore, he had no money. He spent the four days in Liverpool begging for food to stay the fierce hunger that racked his strong young body. As it happened, the only acknowledgement he received was from a peddler wheeling a pushcart, whom he approached on a Liverpool street. The pushcart contained only onions, and in response to papa's gestures, the peddler gave him a bag full. Crouched in dark alleyways near the docks, clutching his passport and counting the hours until he should once more board

the ship, in those four days and nights papa's bitterness grew as rancid as the taste of the onions in his mouth. "So this is the way the world is," his thoughts ran, "nobody gives you anything, but everybody takes from you!"

He took stock of his assets. They were a strong back and a willingness to work. And then he looked at his hands. "And ten fingers," he added. "All right!" he vowed. "I will work hard! Nothing will be too much for these ten fingers to do. And if they ever get hold of any money, no one will take it away!"

Papa was scrupulously honest. Although lopsided, our scale was true. Papa never under-weighed or short changed a customer. Papa was honest, even when it hurt. Although it meant less of a profit, he would not recommend an expensive product where an inexpensive one would do. And papa was honest when nobody was looking. This fact was pointed up to me on account of a little incident.

From time to time mania and papa were invited to attend a Bar-Mitzvah or a wedding. On these festive occasions it was papa's custom to give money. Money was money, he said, and besides, the time and effort required to select a suitable gift seemed to him superfluous.

At one wedding they attended, they were seated at their table and the chopped fish had already been served when papa noticed that someone had placed a bottle of Scotch whisky directly in front of him. Placed it there and simply forgotten all about it. The guests at their table had by this time had their customary drink before eating, and as he had downed his, papa had noted how really good it tasted. Exceptionally- good! It tasted like more, as a matter of fact. And there before his eyes stood the bottle, nearly full, Papa looked about cautiously. His fellow guests appeared to be eating with gusto. Exhilarated as always by the presence of faces, mama was

happily engrossed in chatter. And no one was paying the slightest attention to him or the bottle of whisky. Gingerly papa reached out his arm and refilled his glass. And before the plates from the chopped fish were cleared, he had downed his second drink. Oh *mammenu!* What whisky this was! Never in his life had papa tasted anything like it. And still no one noticed anything amiss.

By the time the wedding guests were at the prunes and raisins, the bottle stood empty and papa was decidedly drowsy. Drowsy and heavy, his nerves relaxed so that he felt almost like singing. (For papa possessed an excellent singing voice, and had he but had the training, he might have made a fine cantor.)

When mama and papa took their leave that evening, papa placed his gift into the hand of the bridegroom. And although the bridegroom was probably unaware of it, when he got around to opening the envelope, he found in it an unprecedented gift from Elia and Rachel Siegel. Instead of the customary five dollars, this particular envelope contained ten. For such superior whisky, papa estimated, retailed for approximately five dollars a bottle.

Sophie

My love for my parents was strong. For as long as I could remember, my thoughts were tied up with them. With papa, of course, but mostly with mama. With mama and her coffee pot, bubbling always on the stove; with mama and her sewing, singing late into the night; with mama at the door, like some bright-eyed sentinel rallying her customer with a reassuring pat on the shoulder; with mama and her quick smile, like a streak of sunshine bursting through a dark cloud; with mama and her trust in people; with mama and her mitzvahs; with mama.

The high point in mama's week was Wednesday, the day she looked upon as her holiday. Since it was quiet at the store, she felt free to leave papa alone while she went to Baton's. Bright and early in the morning mama would dress and with a deep sense of excitement set off on her weekly expedition. My sister Annie had once gone along and told me about it. It took little imagination on my part to fill in the details.

The statue of the late Timothy Eaton occupied a place of honour at the Yonge Street entrance to the store. Every Wednesday mama would stand and gaze in admiration at the bronze image of this man. She had heard that Timothy Eaton had been an immigrant to Canada and a humble peddler, and she felt a strong sense of kinship with him. As a matter of fact, she felt quite personally attached to his memory. If the whole truth were known, mama liked to think of Timothy Eaton as her late uncle.

With awe mama walked up one floor and down the other, viewing such merchandise as radios, tea services, grandfather clocks, ladies' suits, frocks, and even fur coats.

Then she went down to the basement, where she made her modest purchases for resale in our store. As she put it herself, mama licked many a bone at the hands of Baton's salespeople, who had her interests at heart. However, this advantage could result in the provocation of papa's easy vexation. For occasionally mama bought merchandise because it was on sale and for which our store had little call. Such a purchase was the needlepoint.

"From our customers on relief, who is looking to buy needlepoint?" papa queried her irritably.

"Where is it written," countered mama, "that Siegel's must deal only with people on relief?"

Papa was right, of course. Of the eight pieces, mama managed to sell only three. One to Harriet Harris, one to Mrs. Badgeley and one to old Mrs. Gady on Parliament Street. The remaining five lay in a drawer in the dry goods department month in and month out, and the sight of them rankled papa's practical soul.

"Why do they bother you so much?" cried mama. "Are they asking you for anything to eat?"

"Would you call needlepoint Dry Goods?" papa wanted to know.

"No, it's called Fancy Goods," stated mama.

"And do you see Fancy Goods painted on the window?" papa nagged on.

"If it will make you feel better, paint Fancy Goods on the window," mama replied.

Papa fussed over mama's flightiness in making such a purchase until mama conceded. "All right, Elia, I made a mistake." And then her voice grew wistful. "But they had a piece of it finished and hanging on the wall. A circle of flowers in a frame. I know it was a *mishgabis*, but I couldn't help myself."

I was a happy girl. And I never felt poor. Although most of the people among whom I lived were poor, their poverty did not affect me in a personal way. I realized that there were many things that my family could not afford, and that mama and papa worked hard for a living. But I never lacked for anything that mattered. I was aware of my own ignorance.

There were many things I did not understand, indeed, was not likely to understand for some time to come. But basking always in mama's warm assurances, I looked forward to the future.

Towards my parents I felt a nagging sense of responsibility. For instance, if I was playing handball or tether at the schoolyard, I seldom indulged myself too long. Sometimes I left a game unfinished, without waiting for my opponent's turn. For once the hour neared five o'clock, I felt guilty because I knew that I was needed.

I could picture the five o'clock rush. The store would become crowded with people, and mama and papa would be dashing about in all directions. Then the telephone would ring for a last-minute delivery. Mama would turn apologetic eyes towards papa. And papa, harried and irritable, would dart his pencil into his mouth and quickly sketch his symbols for the articles ordered. The milk bottle, the three large circles, the small can with the beans on it, the large can with the tomato on it, the box for soda crackers, the herring in oil.

Each time I had to struggle with myself, for I was reluctant to leave the game when I was having so much fun. But try as I would to resist it, my guilt would overcome me, and in spite of the disdainful expression on my opponent's face, in spite even of the reputation of poor sport, I would forsake game and opponent, and hurry home to help.

Although I had implicit trust in mama's goodness and wisdom, and even though my attachment to her was the stronger, still there were times when I found myself pitying my father. Indeed, papa often reminded me of a person shut outside where it

is dark and cold, and looking inside where it is bright and warm. And when I saw the familiar grey look appear on his face as, closing his lips tightly, papa struggled with himself to accept defeat in the constant tug-of-war between him and mama, my heart went out to him. And secretly I hoped that this time papa might win the argument over money.

And oh, how often did I wish that mama would take papa's side against his endless stream of adversaries! Simply sympathize with papa, and let it go at that! For surely, if mama would only do that sometimes, wasn't it possible that papa would be less cranky and irritable? Wasn't it?

And why, oh why did mama not understand that by her relentless comments:

“Elia, what are you grumbling?”

“Elia, what are you mumbling?”

“Elia, what are you *mizzuble* now?”

she was merely fanning the flames and irritating papa the more. If only mama wouldn't say those things! If only mama wouldn't say anything at all when papa was in a bad mood! But mama could never bear not to say anything at all!

Partners in Business, Partners in Life

I'm sure that mama never deliberately set out to irritate papa. It was just that things usually worked out that way. Take the matter of Mrs. Badgeley's unpaid bill, which was mounting every week and which was such a thorn in papa's side—mama often contributed to that herself.

“What's wrong, Elia? What are you *mizzuble* now?” It was Saturday night. Mama and papa were in the process of closing up shop, and mama was concerned because papa was aggravated again.

“What am I *mizzuble*? This corn is rotten already! That's what I'm *mizzuble*!”

Frowning a little, mama approached the bushel, and bending down she appraised the ears of corn inside. “Well,” she said, straightening, “there's about four dozen left. Do you want to listen to me, Elia? Leave them for now, and Monday morning we could clear them for fifteen cents a dozen.”

Papa shook his head. “By Monday,” he snapped, “we can throw the whole shooting-match in the ashcan!” And embarking now upon one of his tirades, he asserted, “Our whole profit thrown in the ashcan! I tell you, Rachel, if I ever see that long-nosed farmer again, you can be sure that all that is bitter on my mind I will let out at him!”

Mama raised her hand. “Elia, Elia, take it easy! It's only a couple dozen corn, and you won't go broke over it.”

“It’s the waste!” declared papa. “It’s the shameful waste of it that hurts me, Rachel.”

At this mama bit her lip, for she didn’t like to see good food go to waste either. Thoughtfully she sought a solution to the problem. And sure enough, a moment later, her eyes lit up. “Sophie? Come here, please.”

“Yes, mama?” I was at her side almost immediately.

“Sophie, put all the corn from the bushel in two big bags, dear, and take them over to Mrs. Badgeley’s house. If Mrs. Badgeley is out, just leave them in the hall.”

While I stuffed the corn into the bags, mama stepped over to the sheaf of papers hanging from the large hook on the wall. She ruffled through them until she found Mrs. Badgeley’s sheet for that day. And taking her lead pencil, in one smooth flowing motion she drew a picture of an ear of corn. It was distinguishable from a banana only by the three-strands of corn silk coming out of the top. Then through the corn she slashed the figure four to indicate the quantity, and beside it, no doubt giving Mrs. Badgeley the benefit of Monday’s reduction, she added the price -60. With that she dusted her hands against each other, and turned to papa. “I don’t know about you, Elia,” she commented, “but I know I feel better.”

Somehow it had all happened too fast for papa. He blinked. “*Noo, i’osta!*” was all he said.

Take too, that business about the electrical outlet in the basement. That was a pretty good example of how things usually worked out. When mama had first learned that an electrician was needed to install an outlet in our basement, she had called in a qualified man. Careful to inquire the price beforehand, mama was told that the job would cost ten dollars and that it would take two days to complete. “O. K.,” said mama, “go ahead and do the job.”

But papa had interrupted. “Well, now just a moment,” he said and, turning to the electrician, he added, “I would like to think it over, if you don’t mind. I have your telephone number, and I’ll call you back.”

Papa, it seemed, had a better idea. He had heard of a man who lived in the West End. This man, although fully employed, did odd jobs in his spare time and the odd jobs included electrical work. From what papa understood, the man charged only fifty cents an hour for his services. And after all, how long would it take to install an outlet altogether?

And so the man from the West End was hired. The first evening he came to inspect the job. This took one half-hour. Taking out a scratch pad from his pocket, the man from the West End made a note of it. Week in and week out thereafter for six weeks the man came, putting in half an hour here and an hour there. And each time he came, he kept a record of it. Of course, all this time there was as yet no outlet in the basement.

When at long last the job was completed, mama and papa stood side by side before the man as he made his computations on the kitchen table. Including parts, and with time spent, carfare, etc., etc., the bill came to \$9.50. And by now, disgruntled and anxious to see the last of the man from the West End, papa grudgingly handed him a ten-dollar bill.

But it was mama’s remark that caused papa his real chagrin. Indeed so far as he was concerned, it was the last straw. For just as the man’s hand closed over the ten-dollar bill, mama blurted out the words, “Keep the change.”

I remember a day when for some mysterious reason papa felt disinclined to argue. That day mama emerged with a rather easy victory. And I was promptly commissioned to carry out the mitzvah. Actually, papa had frowned upon it from the start. When

pressed for a reason, he had replied irritably that his disapproval should be reason enough. For it was his opinion that I should not be asked to do it. It was his opinion also that mama and he owed Mrs. Ottochuck exactly nothing, and furthermore, that her cousin who had recently moved into the house at 240 Sumach Street was in no way their responsibility. Or mine, either.

“But Elia, it’s such a pity!” said mama. “Here is a poor woman just over from the Old Country, with three small children, with no husband in sight and no source of support. Someone must help her!”

Papa took a skeptical view of Mrs. Ottochuck’s cousin, who had three children and the mention of whose husband was shrouded in mystery. “Well, there must have been at least one husband,” he muttered, “for there to be three children.”

“Elia, we’ve been over all that before,” mama pleaded. “Surely you understand that the poor soul must live somehow! The trouble is that she cannot make herself understood in English and neither can anyone else in that house.”

“So let them elect someone else to be her spokesman,” suggested papa curtly. “Not my daughter!”

“If I could read and write, I would go with her myself,” mama pointed out, “but do I have to telling you how it is? Right away they ask you how to spell it,”

This chance remark had the effect of somewhat softening papa. “Well, you’re right there,” he conceded, a little consoled by her evident sympathy for this particular sore spot of his. “All those government employees are the same! The government pays them good wages out of the taxpayers’ hard-earned money, and all they know is to ask, “How you spell it? How you spell it?”

“So you see, Elia,” mama pressed her advantage. “It has to be Sophie.”

“And where is it written,” replied papa sullenly, “that every hole in the neighbourhood must be plugged up by Sophie?”

“Sophie goes to high school. Sophie can spell it, and Sophie will know what to say when they ask the questions.” And encouraged by papa’s momentary silence, mama added, “And anyway, it wouldn’t hurt our child to learning to do a mitzvah.”

Papa now turned to mama. “You know, Rachel? I’m glad you said that.”

“Why, Elia?” Mama was pleased with him for the moment, for she mistakenly assumed that with her comment she had struck a responsive chord.

“Because,” explained papa, divulging not a trace of the altruism with which she had credited him, “I expected you to say it, and I would have been disappointed if you hadn’t.”

For papa considered it unfair to expose me to a penury that was not rightfully mine. But he was aware that he could not impart his feelings to mama without somewhere along the line losing his temper. Since he didn’t feel like arguing today, he rather wearily consented. I would escort Mrs. Ottochuck’s cousin, Mrs. Safka, to the Welfare Office at the City Hall and help her with her application for relief.

A Social Evening

I was ready to go because I was not changing my clothes, but mama and papa were still dressing. Mama had decided on her navy polka dot tonight, and papa was wearing his good grey suit. Mama was looking forward to the evening, because she always enjoyed getting together with a few neighbours at Mrs. Badgeley's house. Papa was coming along because he was fascinated by Paul Suede's radio. And as for myself, I had mixed feelings about the social evening ahead. I felt awkward about being only with adults, but on the other hand I disliked being alone behind the darkened store. Besides, it was very exciting to listen to a radio. Especially on a Sunday evening when the Chase and Sanborn Hour was on. The stars of this program, Charlie McCarthy and Edgar Bergen, were great favorites. As were, on other programs, Kate Smith, Rudy Vallee 'The Vagabond Lover,' Bing Crosby, and of course Amos and Andy.

From the doorway of my parents' bedroom, I watched now as mama unpinned her hair. It fell to her waist in sleek black waves like a dark cape. Mama brushed and parted it, then coiled and pinned it securely in a wide thick bun at the back of her head. Leaning forward, mama studied herself in her mirror. She pinched her cheeks and bit her lips to give herself a little colour. Then she spoke. "Sophie?"

"Yes, mama?"

"Go into the store, dear, and get me a small jar marmalade. And pick out three nice oranges in a bag."

Mania seldom crossed a threshold without bearing a well chosen gift. She knew that Mrs. Badgeley liked to serve marmalade with those delicious English crumpets of hers; besides, marmalade

was sweet, and to bring something sweet to a friend was a good omen. The oranges were for Mr. Suede in appreciation of his generosity in the use of his radio. Mama felt that oranges would be beneficial to a sick man.

When we arrived, our nostrils were met by the characteristic smell of Mrs. Badgeley's hallway—the pungent odour of the cats, mingled with the scent of furniture polish and the fragrance of baking. As we entered the dining room, we could see that the evening was already warming up. In addition to us, Mrs. Badgeley had invited the Maloneys, the Wigginses and the Gady's. The Misses Victoria and Alicia Newhall were present, their genteel eyes and ears soaking up every word and impression. And Paul Suede, of course. Christina had opened the door between his room and the dining room, and he sat now comfortably in his armchair among the others.

It was almost a foregone conclusion that Maude Maloney and Hazel Wiggins would attend without their husbands. Everyone knew that when sober, Orville Maloney never mingled with his neighbours. Besides, Orville did not like women in a social way. Hazel Wiggins he particularly disliked. He did not like Jews either, or 'foreigners' of any description. Come to think of it, Orville found most human beings insufferable, and the only sincere emotion he felt for them was pure malice.

As for Hazel, no one remembered ever seeing her husband. Indeed, but for the fact that a new baby appeared at regular intervals, one might have suspected that she had no husband. But Hazel had a husband, all right. The trouble was that Joe Wiggins spent most of his time behind bars, locked up for a series of petty thefts.

Lean and ascetic, the artist Frank Gady sat next to his obese and dishevelled wife. Bertha Gady was known as the greatest sloven in our district, and so far as I know perhaps in all of Toronto. Actually, Mrs. Badgeley had only a nodding acquaintance with this couple, but they looked to her as if they could do with a night out.

"It's good to seeing you again, Mr. Suede," said mama, and added, "I've brought you some nice oranges."

Papa rather stiffly shook his hand. "Good evening Mr. Suede."

I was next, and it startled me a little to feel the limpness of the hand that Mrs. Badgeley's boarder held out to me.

When we were seated, mama leaned forward anxiously. "Do you like oranges, Mr. Suede?" she inquired.

"Yes, yes, thank you, Mrs. Siegel."

"They're very healthy, you know. I remember in the Old Country they would give orange juice to a person in a faint."

A shadow of a smile passed across Paul Suede's face. "In that case, I'll be sure to eat them, Mrs. Siegel."

Mama looked at him gratefully, then sat back in her chair and sighed. And I remember thinking that Mr. Suede was much sicker than I had realized.

In her bashful manner, Hazel Wiggins now spoke. Timid little Hazel often came to mama for advice and encouragement in raising her brood. And mama, who let it be known that she looked upon a large family of children as a beautiful garden growing, had a way of saying just the right thing to Hazel. "Mrs. Siegel, my goodness I have a mind to ask you something."

"Any time, Mrs. Wiggins."

"It's about my Clarence, my four-year-old, you know? He's had a cold for two weeks and I can't get him to eat anything. My goodness, but he's going downhill."

"Has he got a temperature?" mama asked immediately.

Hazel shook her head.

"Then I wouldn't worry too much about his not eating, Mrs. Wiggins. Keep giving him lots to drink. And if he's coughing, it would be good if you could get him to taking some honey in hot milk." Mama glanced at me. "I'll send some chicken soup around for his supper tomorrow."

Hazel smiled self-consciously, then she slunk back into her customary shadow for the balance of the evening. She was relieved to have the attention diverted to Maude Maloney at her side. "As a matter of fact, Mrs. Siegel," Maude declared, "I'm that worried about my Orv!"

"Oh?" said mama, and she cocked a suspicious eye in Maude's direction. Maude nodded. "That's right! Orv had a cold over a month ago and he's been off his feed ever since. The poor chap's lost pounds!"

Mama now gave Maude what was for her an indifferent look. "Well, I'm sure he'll be all right," she said. But I suspected that what mama was privately thinking she did not add: "Such a poor chap, it wouldn't hurt him to lose a few pounds."

All the while, Christina bustled back and forth setting the table. She now entered the dining room carrying a fresh baked apple pie, and placed it lovingly beside the English crumpets. At her feet, following her haughtily were her two Persian cats, both with fluffy red ribbons round their necks.

Bertha Gady spoke next. "Mrs. Siegel, would you tell us a story tonight?"

"Here, here," cried Maude Maloney.

Mama could always be relied upon to enliven a room with an entertaining anecdote. Tonight she related the following one.

Two old Orthodox Jews were once walking side by side in the Black Forest. One of them was carrying a broom. As they walked along, piously proclaiming to each other their faith in the miracles of the Old Testament, they were startled by the approach of a wolf. Falling to their knees, the two frightened men prayed, and the one who carried the broom held it out for protection.

Now it so happened that at that moment a hunter passed by. Catching sight of the wolf and the plight of the old men, he knelt, took aim and with a single shot felled the beast, which fell at the feet of the bearded men.

The Jews then rose to their feet.

“Do you see?” said the one. “This quite bears out our point.”

“Yes,” agreed the other. “It’s as we said. If the Almighty should will it, then even a broom will shoot.”

The evening went nicely. While the three men sat by quietly, the women did most of the talking.

Mama gave out her recipe for sweet-and-sour cabbage rolls. You used brown sugar and the juice of two lemons. For the ache in Victoria Newhall’s back, she suggested a mustard plaster. Regarding the squabbles among children, she warned, “Never fight over children. In an hour the children will be friends again, but the parents will remain enemies forever.”

Inevitably they gathered around mama, drawn to her like nails to a magnet. It surprised me a little when Paul Suede turned to me and, in little more than a whisper, remarked, “If I may say so, Miss Siegel, your mother has missed her calling. The way she holds an audience in the palm of her hand, she should be on the stage.”

“When is it that a poor man rejoices?” we heard her say. “When he loses something and finds it again.”

Then a little while later.

“Like wheels within a wheel, it is a world with worlds within.”

and...

“If all our troubles were packed into a bundle, and the bundle hung out on a line beside the bundles of other people’s troubles, we might be surprised how fast we would grab our own bundle.”

Then, as by a signal, a hush fell upon the little group. “Ladies and gentlemen...” came the bouncy voice of Harry Von Zell. “The Chase and Sanborn Hour, starring...” All eyes opened wide and all ears strained lest they miss a single moment of the show. Paul Suede appeared pleased to note with what delight Mrs. Badgeley’s guests received the program. During Rubinoff’s violin selection, all were appropriately soulful. Eddie Cantor’s sentimentality brought tears to the eyes, and at the comic antics of Charlie McCarthy and

Edgar Bergen, everybody laughed heartily. Mama’s laughter, I was aware, was an octave higher than the rest.

When the program was over, Paul was persuaded to speak about the far-off lands where he had been, thus bringing the world right into Mrs. Badgeley’s dining room. Then under his guidance, the conversation touched upon subjects of current interest.

- The President of the United States—the toss of his head, the charm of his smile, and the cheering line from his 1933 inaugural address: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

- The Lindbergh kidnapping and the Hauptmann trial.

- John Dillinger.

- The dictators of the world—the Chinese dictator, that lean man Chiang Kai-Shek; the dictator of Germany and his comical mustache, and the dictator of Italy, Benito Mussolini, who had recently attacked a defenceless little country that no one had ever heard of before, by the name of Abyssinia.

But for the most part they spoke about the Depression. This was their persistent theme. The Depression, starvation wages, Canada’s unemployment, the administration of relief, charitable organizations, the black day in 1929 when the Stock Market crashed. And the prosperity that was just around the corner, but which corner nobody knew.

At 10:30 Mrs. Badgeley brought the brown earthenware teapot from her kitchen, and we all gathered around the table for refreshments. All in all, it was a successful and stimulating social evening. It was occasions such as this, mama and papa later agreed, that helped break up the long winter.

Franzl Parlmutter

Of the many visitors who frequented our kitchen for coffee and a little simple sociability, none was more regular than Franzl Parlmutter. I have always thought that what mama did for this old man demonstrated her finest spirit of mitzvah.

Any Monday, Wednesday or Friday morning about the hour of half-past ten, Franzl Parlmutter could be seen at our table, with his lank grey hair hanging over his forehead and his walrus mustache flopping down over his coffee cup. Franzl was a Polish man and, although he had been in Canada now for many years, essentially he had remained an alien who had never acquired the English language. A shy lonely person, he was hungry for conversation, and mama always made it a point to sit with him while he drank his coffee and to chat with him in his native tongue.

At one time, mama had taken her old countryman into her home as a boarder in an effort to supplement her slim budget. Franzl stayed with our family for nearly four years, until the time when we moved into the quarters behind the grocery store where there was no room for him. Since then Franzl had occupied a succession of dreary furnished rooms in the city, the present one in a distant street somewhere in remote Toronto Junction. In the years since he had moved away, it had become Franzl's habit to visit his former landlady regularly two or three times a week. Usually on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings.

One Monday morning Franzl failed to show up. When the hour of half-past ten went by and Franzl did not come, mama was not particularly concerned. For occasionally, she knew, the old man missed a day. But when two days later he did not appear, she began to feel uneasy. And several times during Wednesday morning she

stepped outside onto the street and strained her eyes for a glimpse of a tall stooped figure in black, approaching with the help of a cane.

When Friday arrived and still he did not come, mama was sick at heart. I knew because she told me. She also told papa. "I wasn't before, Elia," she said, her dark eyes clouded with anxiety, "but I'm really worried now. Something must have happened to Franzl."

Papa turned impatient eyes upon her. "Oh, for heaven's sake!" he replied. "What are you making such a fuss! Do you think you own the old man? Does he owe you an explanation if he decides not to go visiting for a week or two?"

But mama shook her head. "If Franzl didn't come to me," she said, gazing at papa reproachfully, "it's because he can't. I tell you, Elia, Franzl is sick!"

I knew that mama hated to ask it of me, but as she explained, she could stand it no longer. She must go and find out for herself what was the matter with Franzl. And would I please stay home from school because Friday was a busy day in the store and papa was feeling nervous.

It took her the entire morning to do it, but finally mama managed to locate Franzl's room in Toronto Junction. And to be sure, she found her old countryman in his lonely little room. Half-starved, filthy and delirious with fever.

Mama made two trips to Toronto Junction that day, the second time pointing out to me that she was about to do a mitzvah. And accompanied by young Dr. Tyler from Gerrard Street, into whose hand she had quietly tucked a dollar bill, she took along a shopping bag, which, among other things, contained oranges, a jar of chicken soup, fresh towels, soap, a pair of papa's long underwear and a plug of chewing tobacco.

Franzl was subsequently removed to hospital, and later when he recovered from the pneumonia, he was admitted as a permanent resident to the Catholic Home for Aged Men on Power Street. His acceptance at the Home was due largely to mama, who presented

his case. I, serving as mama's secretary, filled out all the necessary forms.

Franz was well taken care of after that. The nuns at the Home were very kind to all their charges. And every Thursday they allowed the men an afternoon out to visit friends. One day they found Franzl Parlmutter, and as it happened, it was a Thursday afternoon. The old man in the black coat lay huddled on the sidewalk. Dead. Right there on Sackville Street, outside the bath house.

The bath house on Sackville Street, it might be noted, was just about half the distance between the Catholic Home for Aged Men on Power Street and Siegel's Groceteria at the corner of Sumach and Oak.

Sophie and the 'Shochet'

I was Mama's appointed 'message girl.' In order to pay the milkman on Tuesday, she would send me to borrow ten dollars from Mrs. Green, with a promise to return it on Friday. And then on Friday, likely as not, she would send me to borrow ten dollars from old Mrs. Gady on Parliament Street, in order to repay Mrs. Green. (Mama was always careful to furnish her creditor with a commission on her money—a box of matches, a bar of soap, a lemon.) Whenever the stork arrived in our district, close on the heels of the big bird, I was there with a jar of mama's chicken soup. I also delivered countless jars of mama's durable broth to the frail and ailing among our customers.

And although I had no particular objection to being mama's messenger, I was often appalled at mama's lack of perception. She appeared never to notice how unwillingly I went on some of her errands. As I look back now, I realize that in addition to being her 'message girl,' I was also mama's foil. For it was simply impossible that mama didn't know how much I hated to go to the *shochet*.

How I wished that mama wouldn't send me to the shochet! But there was no escape. To begin with, mama had a standing order with the poultry farmer that each Monday and Thursday after lunch, he deliver a plump live chicken to the store. Then, after personally subjecting the chicken to a thorough physical examination, mama would hold it while the farmer tied its feet together. Next, the chicken would be placed, cackling and thrashing about, into a brown paper shopping bag behind the counter, to await my return from school.

It was my inevitable chore every Monday and Thursday to transport the chicken to the shochet on Ontario Street for decapitation and plucking. And shrinking from my task, I would gloomily plod the seven or eight blocks to the shochet's house, occasionally peeking gingerly over the edge of the shopping bag at the captive rustling within.

At a scrubbed white table in his immaculate garage sat the orthodox man, wearing a black skull cap. His fine scholarly head was all but sunk into his body as, with heavy-lidded eyes and pursed lips he perused the pages of the Talmud. I knew better than to disturb him while he was thus preoccupied. And so, seating myself on a white chair beside the table, I would wait silently, all the while wretchedly clinging to the writhing crackling shopping bag in my lap.

In a little while the shochet would rise and without a word remove the bag from my hands. This was the moment when I fled to the yard and held my ears against the bloodcurdling squawk soon to pierce the air. It was undoubtedly a bad ten minutes for me, but by the time I returned to the garage to pay the shochet his fee, he had finished his work and all was quiet. And a brown parcel lay, soundless, at the bottom of the shopping bag.

Then, later, as if I hadn't suffered enough already, mama would shake her head in disapproval at me! And she would accuse me of being stubborn! I will admit that I was capable of working up a pretty firm resistance in my refusal to eat chicken, and as exasperated as mama would become, on this issue she had to resign herself.

Aunt Esther's Vacation

“Noo, Sophie, so go already!” Mama's voice carried all the way from the store. “Visiting hours are only from two to four!”

“O. K., mama, I'm ready,” I called back. I was in the kitchen, hurrying as far as I could. Slipping into my coat, I flung my scarf about my neck, and dashed down the five steps to the store. Then snatching the paper bag mama held out to me, the bag containing the three oranges and the pound of grapes for Aunt Esther, a moment later I was off again. On another message for mama.

“Tell Auntie she shouldn't worry about nothing! Tell her I couldn't come today because it's Saturday, but I'll be there tomorrow. For sure!” I heard the tinkling of the bell, and the door closed behind me.

My Aunt Esther was currently in St. Michael's Hospital, enjoying her 'vacation'—twelve glorious days in hospital following the birth of a baby. Mama's sister, now in her early forties, had a few days before been delivered of her sixth child, a lusty ten-pound boy.

Aunt Esther's first three children had been born at home, for Aunt Esther, staunch homebody that she was, seldom left her house. As a matter of fact, Aunt Esther disliked going out for several reasons. For example, Aunt Esther disliked going out in winter, if it should be cold outside. She also disliked going out in summer, if it should be hot. Or if it snowed. Or hailed. Or if it should rain. Therefore, it had been solely upon the unqualified recommendation of a trusted neighbour that Aunt Esther had consented to venture from her house as far as the Bond Street hospital for the birth of her fourth child. And as things turned out she was very happy that she did. For quite by accident, Aunt

Esther had thus stumbled upon a heaven-sent, twelve-day refuge for tired mothers.

I found my aunt propped up in bed in the maternity ward, in the starched white of the hospital linen looking antiseptic and unusually well rested. Bending over her, I kissed her on the cheek, and handed her the bag that mama had sent. Aunt Esther first thanked me profusely for the fruit, and leaning well back on her pillows, she smiled expansively.

“I’ll explain you, Sophie,” she said. “To start, here at the hospital they have the baby for you...” Then critically choosing an orange from the bag I had brought, Aunt Esther began to peel it with infinite leisure. “It’s not like I don’t having oranges at home, Sophie,” she now explained, “but you’re understanding how it is. The children are yelling. The dog is fighting with the cat, and Uncle is going crazy. Go! Sit down in the middle and peel an orange!”

A few minutes later I was rather surprised to hear one of the other patients in the ward address my aunt. “Mrs. Greenberg, if you don’t mind,” said the woman lying three beds over, “I’d like a drink of water.”

With alacrity, Aunt Esther slid from her bed and slipped her bare feet into her house slippers. Walking out into the corridor, she fetched a paper cup filled with water. Then she handed it to the woman, and took a moment or two to adjust the other patient’s pillows.

“Auntie Esther,” I cried, as she settled herself back in bed, “why should you get the water for that lady? Why doesn’t the nurse do it?”

Aunt Esther had another explanation. She had been coming to this hospital now, she said, for three babies, and the service was wonderful. The nurses, she pointed out, were all very kind, and she for one appreciated every kindness. She was of the opinion, however, that it was not fair to take too much advantage. And so upon her admittance each time, she was careful to give instructions to the

other patients, to the effect that should they require anything, they were to ask her for it. And not to bother the nurses.

An Evening Out

How many of us can remember the very first time our parents attended a movie? I know that at first mine were reluctant to go. It was Friday, the night I did no homework. The store was closed and the kitchen tidied after our evening meal. When I first approached papa, he pulled his lips downward. “No, I don’t think so, Sophie,” he said. “I think Saturday is a better night to go to the show.”

“But papa!” I cried, “how can you say that when you’ve never been to a show in your whole life?”

“No, no,” papa replied. “You go with your girlfriend, and you can maybe tell us about it, when you come home.”

“Aw, come on, papa!” I pleaded. And turning to mama, I coaxed, “Tell papa to go, mama, and you go too! It will be a real treat for both of you. Besides, Faye’s mother won’t let her out tonight, and I don’t want to go alone.”

“You won’t be alone,” remarked mama. “There’s plenty people at the show.”

“Aw, come on, mama! Don’t be like that. Everybody says it’s a good picture!” I continued to wheedle and beg until mama weakened.

“Well, is it a laughing or a crying?” she inquired, turning to me dubiously. “Because you know, Sophie, your papa and me, we don’t like sad.”

“Oh, it’s not a bit sad, mama!” I enthused. “It’s called ‘The Merry Widow’ and it has this gorgeous big star in it, Jeanette McDonald. And it’s all full of music!”

“A musicker?” papa pricked up his ears, He was very fond of music. “How much does it cost to go there?”

“The cost, always the cost,” mama muttered. But fortunately papa had his poor ear toward her and did not hear.

“It’s thirty cents for each person, papa,” I said, now feeling hopeful, “and they give out dishes tonight too.”

Perhaps it was on account of the dishes, and perhaps not, but in any event papa was beginning to think it over. For now glancing at mama out of the corner of his eye, he said, “Should I make the jacket heater, Rachel?”

“Oh papa,” I groaned, “You don’t need to take a bath! It’s only a neighbourhood movie. Just go as you are!”

But papa insisted. “An occasion is an occasion,” he pointed out. And if he was going to go to the show, well then, he was going to go at his best. He subsequently bathed, shaved, brushed his thinning hair, and removing his good grey suit from its mothballs, he dressed with the utmost care. When at long last he appeared in the kitchen prepared for the evening’s entertainment, he held himself straight and proud. And mama regarded him with eyes full of admiration. For dressed in the good grey suit with a white shirt and a tie, with his grey eyes luminous against his clear skin, papa was indeed handsome. More handsome, mama said, even now than any man she had ever laid eyes on!

As I plodded along Parliament Street, all but forgotten by my parents who were now chattering animatedly about the treat in store for them, I couldn’t help feeling rather glum. After the big fuss mama and papa had made over it, I wondered if it was going to be worth while. All I could do was hope that “The Merry Widow” was as good as everyone said it was. As good, anyway, as “One Hour With You” and “Love Me Tonight.”

“Have you any idea how much that cost to make!” remarked papa, as the three of us left the theatre.

Mama linked her arm through his. “Well, Elia, you have to take your hat off to some people! That’s all I can say.”

Mama and papa were impressed by the enormity of the investment involved in making the picture. Until tonight, their experience with the theatre had been limited to live Jewish productions performed on the bare boards of The Strand on Spadina Avenue.

“Son-of-a-gun!” said papa, and he shook his head from side to side. “Son-of-a-gun!”

After that evening, mama and papa had a new interest. Whenever Faye and I patronized the movies, they asked, “What’s playing?” And occasionally they went.

Papa and the Telephone Operator

The breakfast rush was over, I had left for school, and the three men, George, Freddie and Mr. McGillivray had already had their coffee. Walking back through the store, they picked up their respective baskets and scuffed brown suitcase, and thanked mama before taking their leave.

Once outside, while the condiment salesman set off on foot, the milkman and breadman took the time to tend their respective horses, which, while waiting for their drivers, were feeding at the curb. We were by no means completely motorized in that era and it was still commonplace for deliveries to be made by horse and wagon. I remember Freddie’s horse well. It was a bay with white spots. George’s was a dapple-grey mare. And in winter both wore checkered blankets. I remember, too, how fond the men were of their horses. Each man now removed the nosebag from his animal, watered it from a pail that he had filled at our kitchen sink, and patted it quite affectionately. Then climbing into the wagon, using the reins he smartly flicked the horse’s hindquarters, and with a brisk cry of ‘giddy-tip,’ continued on his way.

In summer, neighbourhood horses were often as not bedecked with straw hats to protect them against the heat of the sun. Then it was the custom to water them against the corner of Winchester and Parliament Streets at the ‘old style double.’ This public utility, believe it or not, was a combination horse trough and drinking fountain. It contained a metal partition, and I remember drinking from the side equipped with bubblers. However, with the coming

of the frost when the water was turned off, each driver hung a pail from the back of his wagon. And he had only to knock on any door to have the pail filled. Any storekeeper or householder was obliged by law to supply drinking water for a horse.

Back in the store, mama and papa settled down to their normal routine. And from what I understood, it was a good steady morning. Mrs. Ottochuck came in with Mrs. Romaniuk, Mrs. Johannsen with Mrs. Nash, Bertha Gaily showed up with her collie dog, and there were four or five transient people. During intervals between customers, mama tidied shelves, wiped clean the windows of the icebox and polished the scale. Over in his section, papa worked diligently at the fruit. He wrapped each orange, shone each apple, and from their stalk tore off bananas in clusters of five or six for display in the window. Papa also answered the telephone and took down two orders for delivery. At the end of the second call, he hung up the receiver. Then pursing his lips, he slowly lifted the receiver once more and made what was for him a routine telephone call. He dialled three digits—1,1,3. In due course he heard it—the cold clear voice of Information.

“This is Information.”

Papa swallowed.”Is this Information?”

“Yes, this is Information. Can I help you?”

“Information,” papa spoke carefully and very politely, “I would like you to find for me, if you don’t mind, that is, the phone number of this man. He happens to be a friend of mine. He is a carpenter by trade, and he lives over the bridge on Broadview Avenue.”

“What is the name, please?”

“His name is Jack.”

“Is that his last name?”

Papa replied humbly, “No, Information, that is his first name.”

“What is the last name, please?”

The name of the man papa sought was Chinsky, but from his pronunciation it perhaps sounded more like Klinsky. However, papa did not know that Mr. Jack Chinsky’s son had had the name listed in the telephone directory as Cowan.

“I believe the name is Klinsky,” said papa.”Yes, Jack Klinsky.”

“How do you spell it, please?” asked Information. This question was followed by silence. So it had come, papa thought. It made not a whit of difference what he did nor how nicely he spoke, it was inevitable anyway. “Well.” Papa frowned. “How would you spell it yourself, Information?”

“I’ll look up J A C K K L I N S K Y on Broadview Avenue.”

“Thank you.”

After a moment’s wait she was back. “Could it possibly be K O L L I N S K Y?”

“Yes, it’s quite possible.”

“One moment, please.”

There was another pause, and then: ‘I’m sorry, sir, but I don’t have a listing for a Jack K O L L I N S K Y on Broadview Avenue. Are you sure that’s the correct spelling?’

“Well, not really.”

“Could it be COLLINSKY with a ‘C’?”

“Yes, that must be it!” stated papa, by this time no doubt mopping his brow with his handkerchief.

“I’m sorry, sir. I have no listing for Jack COLLINSKY on Broadview Avenue. Or spelled with an ‘E’ or two ‘LL’s’ either,”

“What else have you got?”

“I’m sorry, sir, but you do not appear to have the correct name. I’m afraid it’s impossible to help you unless you tell me how to spell it.”

This reply, although given politely enough, was sufficient to knock the chip off papa’s shoulder. “Well, I’m sure you could find it if you tried!” he answered rather irritably. “As I told you before,

this fellow is a carpenter. He's out of work at the present time, but he's a carpenter just the same!"

This time the voice at the other end of the wire was firm. "I'm sorry, sir." It stood its ground. "If you want me to help you, you'll have to tell me how to spell the name."

Papa's voice shifted to its sarcastic tone. "Information, did you go to public school?"

"Yes, of course."

"And did you go to high school?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then would you say that you have a fairly good education?"

"Well, if I didn't, I wouldn't be employed by the Company."

"All right!" cried papa. "You went to public school and you went to high school also. I never went to school at all! So how come you're asking me how to spell it?"

This devastating logic was followed by heavy silence. Then as if she had not been exposed to it, the operator repeated, "I'm sorry, sir. I cannot help you, if you don't know how to spell the name."

"Do you realize," papa now said threateningly, "that you are talking to a taxpayer?"

"I'm sorry, sir. I fail to see what that has to do with it."

"Well, I'll just tell you what it has to do with it!" snapped papa. "It's people like me who sent you to school, and paid for your education! That's what it has to do with it!"

For a long while after he hung up the receiver, papa stood with a puzzled look on his face. "Rachel, if I live to be a hundred," he said wearily, "that's one thing I'll never understand. If she went to school and I didn't, how come she asks me how to spell it?"

Although she was actually in sympathy with him, papa could draw little comfort from mama's answer. "It's your own fault. Who told you to start up?"

"It's ridiculous," said papa. "I just can't understand it!"

"I can't understand it neither," replied mama, "but at least I know enough to wait for Sophie."

"But I'm a taxpayer, Rachel," papa pointed out.

"I know that, Elia," said mama, "but that don't make much difference."

Mrs. Baldovich Takes a Tumble

Mrs. Baldovich came in this morning, and pretty soon her daughter-in-law followed her. As they had crossed the street, young Sheila Baldovich was wheeling a baby carriage in which her three-month-old infant lay sleeping. While Sheila adjusted the brake of the carriage outside, Mrs. Baldovich entered the store. She was a heavy-set woman, with frizzy grey hair and small blue eyes.

“How are you today, Mrs. Baldovich?”

“How I am? Beh! I’m tired out, that’s how I am. The child was up again in the night, and I with him.”

“Didn’t his mother get up to him?” inquired mama.

“Meh! She got up, but what does she know? She’s herself a child.”

“And what about your son, the father? Couldn’t he get up?”

“I should let my son get up? Beh! Meh!” huffed Mrs. Baldovich. “My son goes to work in the morning! He needs to sleep!”

This was a familiar story to mama. Mrs. Baldovich would not allow that her son get up during the night to tend his child, and while she had no objection to her daughter-in-law’s sleep being disturbed, she did not trust her. For Mrs. Baldovich was a ferocious grandmother who night and day patrolled the premises at 247 Sumach Street, constantly on the alert lest her daughter-in-law somehow mistreat her grandchild.

“Ding-a-ling-a-ling,” the bell sounded, and Sheila Baldovich entered. A slim blonde girl of twenty-one, indeed Sheila did not look like a mother. As she came in, she eyed Mrs. Baldovich with apprehension.

“Did you lay him down he shouldn’t fall from the carriage?” her mother-in-law grimly questioned her.

“Yes, mother,” replied Sheila in a timid voice.

“Did you cover him up, he shouldn’t catch a cold?”

“Yes, I did, mother.”

“Not too much, he shouldn’t suffocate, God forbid!”

“Yes, mother.”

“Yes?”

“I mean no! No, mother. Of course not!”

“All right, beh! Tell to Mrs. Siegel what you want.” Sheila lifted hounded eyes to mama. “Mrs. Siegel, I need some safety pins for the baby, and a bottle of skim milk. And a new saucepan to boil the milk in.”

As Sheila spoke, Mrs. Baldovich silently mouthed the words along with her. Then in her sing-song voice she remarked, “Every day is by us a *scaldonish* with the milk. The child cries.”

“Oh, I’m sure the child will do well on a bottle,” said mama. “Many young mothers cannot nurse.”

Mrs. Baldovich nodded meaningfully. “I only know that I nursed. For twenty-two months each child. And I had milk left over to pour down the sink.”

“I sold my extra milk to the hospital,” declared mama, not to be outdone.

When the safety pins, the quart of milk and the saucepan were assembled on the counter, Mrs. Baldovich turned to Sheila again. “All right. Tell to Mrs. Siegel what you want to buy.. for breakfast.”

“Can I have a package of corn flakes, please?” said Sheila.

“Give her a box corn flakes, Mrs. Siegel,” instructed Mrs. Baldovich.

“Anything else?”

“And I’d like a loaf of raisin bread.”

“Give her a loaf raisin bread too.”

By now Mrs. Baldovich must have been shuddering. I happen to know that she always shuddered with distaste at the thought of the poor breakfasts that her son was getting since his marriage. “Go, ask for children!” she muttered from between tight lips.

After the beautiful breakfasts that Mrs. Baldovich used to prepare for her Harvey! After all the years when, mindful that her son had not eaten all through the night while he slept, she had served him such nourishment in the morning as porridge with a lump of butter in it, creamy cocoa and fried bread, he now turned around and preferred to have his breakfast prepared by this incompetent! Insisted upon it, in fact. For on the subject of breakfast, the normally docile Harvey had proven himself most difficult. Nothing would do but that Sheila prepare his breakfast for him. And what was more, that she join him at the meal! And that everyone else stayed out of the kitchen at the time!

When Sheila’s purchases were gathered into a bag, Mrs. Baldovich said out loud, “All right, go, go. I’ll pay Mrs. Siegel.”

For a moment Sheila hesitated. Then she asked, “Is it all right if I take the baby with me, mother?”

“So do you think you could manage, with the bag, with the baby?”

“Oh, I’m sure I can. I’ll just put the bag in the carriage at his feet.”

“All right, go. But be careful crossing the street.”

“Don’t worry, mother. I will,” said Sheila, walking towards the door.

But Mrs. Baldovich was still not satisfied. With her finger upraised, she started after Sheila. “Be care... ful!” she further admonished her, drawing out the words. Then all at once she stumbled. Turned over on her heel and stumbled. One moment she

was standing and the next, it seemed, she had disappeared. With a thud!

As fast as she could, mama came running around the counter to where Mrs. Baldovich lay sprawled on the floor. “Oh, my poor woman!” she cried, kneeling beside her and helping her to a sitting position. “Are you all right?”

Sheila turned from the door, and for one long terrible moment she stood as though riveted to the spot. Then suddenly, like a dam bursting, she let loose with a ripple of hysterical laughter.

“Sheila,” mama spoke kindly, “please, dear, put down your groceries and help me.”

She placed the bag on the counter and, bent over with laughter, Sheila tried to assist mama get her mother-in-law up. Truth to tell, she was so weak from laughing that she was not of much assistance. However, the damage to Mrs. Baldovich was small, and in a few minutes she was back on her feet anyway.

“I’m... very... sorry... mother,” Sheila blurted between bouts of uncontrollable laughter. “I... really... am... very sorry! Won’t... you... let me... help you... with something?”

“Beh! I could manage without help from you. Go, go!”

Sheila picked up her bag once more, and mama opened the door for her. For a moment mama stood watching as the young mother hurried off, pushing the baby carriage before her, and shaking with laughter all the way.

“Did you saw that?” said Mrs. Baldovich, narrowing her small blue eyes. “Did you saw how she laughed when I fell down? An enemy, I tell you, Mrs. Siegel! By me is an enemy in my house!”

“Oh, why should you say things like that?” mama pleaded on Sheila’s behalf. “She’s a good little girl. And believe me, it was her nervousness laughing, not her! Mrs. Baldovich, you yourself are making the girl terrible nervous. Leave her alone already! Stop giving her so much advice!”

“But the child...” began Mrs. Baldovich.

“Oh, Mrs. Baldovich, really! Stop worrying so much about the child.”

“And why shouldn’t I?” retorted Mrs. Baldovich indignantly. “Is he not my child?”

Very firmly, mama shook her head. “No, Mrs. Baldovich. He is not your child. He is your grandchild. After all, Sheila is his mother!”

“Beh!” replied Mrs. Baldovich, dismissing mama’s argument in one fell swoop, “the mothers of today!”

Although Mrs. Baldovich appeared unimpaired after the fall, just to be on the safe side, mama put on her coat and navigated her customer as far as her doorstep. On her return, mama breathed easier. She knew that Mrs. Baldovich was perfectly fine. For all the way home she had kept up her usual monologue to the effect that she disapproved of her daughter-in-law.

Mrs. Baldovich was simply at a loss to understand her son’s infatuation for this blonde slip of a girl. And this was not the only thing about which Mrs. Baldovich was at a loss. She also failed to understand that decade’s progress, when newfangled appliances ran by electricity and turned themselves on and off unassisted. This fad was amply demonstrated when the new refrigerator was delivered to Mrs. Harris’ house. Mrs. Baldovich watched from her front porch as the first such impressive appliance made its debut in the district.

As it happened, that night an earth tremor rumbled through Toronto and roused the city from its slumber. Shaken awake in her bed, Mrs. Baldovich was startled. But only for a moment, for immediately she remembered Mrs. Harris’s refrigerator. “Aha!” she concluded, “it must have turned itself on.”

She mentioned it to mama the next morning. “Do you know, Mrs. Siegel, Mrs. Harris’s refrigerator makes awful noises when it turns itself on,” she said.

“Oh, how do you know that, Mrs. Baldovich?” said mama. She had as yet had no opportunity to mention the earthquake that was on everybody’s lips.

“Because last night,” replied Mrs. Baldovich, “I would swear that it shook me in my bed!”

For once in her life, mama was speechless.

“But you don’t notice it so much in the daytime,” Mrs. Baldovich added.

Mrs. Badgeley Buys a Dress

It was evening. I was at the kitchen table engrossed in my homework. Papa had left for the St. Lawrence Market where he would buy fruits and vegetables direct from the farmers' wagons. In the far corner of the room, mama sat at her sewing machine, steadily pumping the pedal with her foot. Tonight she was stitching pot-holders for stock in the Dry Goods section of the store and, as was her habit while she worked, mama was singing. Just now, in her high sweet voice, she was singing the melodious "Waves of the Danube."

Once or twice I glanced up from my books at the precise moment when mama turned her head. Each time our eyes happened to meet, mama smiled at me gently, without interrupting so much as a note of her song. In that brief moment, mama's love of life reached out and encompassed me. It seemed to me then that a calm filled the air, and as always when I heard my mother singing, I tasted a delicious sense of security. Then mama bent her head over her sewing once more and I returned to the intricacies of chemical formulae.

It wasn't long before we heard a knock on the side door. But before I could answer it, Mrs. Badgeley had already poked her head into the hall. "Yoo hoo, Mrs. Siegel!" she called merrily.

A bright smile lit up mama's face as she rose to greet her friend. "Oh, my dear Mrs. Badgeley, what a nice surprise! Come right in and make yourself at home while I put some coffee on."

Mama filled the coffee-pot with water at the sink, while Christina took off her coat and scarf, laid her Bible on the table and, first patting the back of my head affectionately, settled herself

on a chair. "I met Mr. Siegel on the street," Christina said. "He had a long face. Is he in a bad mood?"

"Oh, Mr. Siegel's always in a bad mood," mama replied matter-of-factly.

Sitting forward on her chair, Christina pinned mama with an intense look. "Mrs. Siegel, if you don't mind, I'd like to make a suggestion for your husband. I think he should convert to Christianity."

Mama, who was just adding some ground coffee to the pot, gave a little start. "Oh no, Mrs. Badgeley. Mr. Siegel's trouble is not his religion."

"Have you asked him about the suit?" Christina wanted to know.

"Not yet."

"So far you haven't caught him in a good mood?"

"That's right," said mama. "But don't worry. I still have a couple of weeks. I'm not planning to visit the children until after the Pidyan Haben anyway."

Christina sighed, then she changed the subject. "I'll tell you why I've come 'round tonight, Mrs. Siegel. I was wondering if you have a nice dress for me in the store. I always get to feeling... you know... a little moody by this time of year. And I thought... a new dress might just perk me up."

"I know what you mean," said mama. "A new dress would be just what the doctor ordered. Now let me think." Mama frowned as she made a mental check of the stock in the Dry Goods section of the store. "You'll need size forty-four, won't you? "Anything in size forty-four and up was stocked in what between mama and me was referred to as the Elephant Department. Watching mama, I imagined that her mind travelled now over all the merchandise in this department and stopped in one corner of the counter's third drawer. For there it spotted three housedresses, folded, all size forty-four. Instantly, mama's eyes lit up. "Yes, I believe I have, Mrs. Badgeley. I have three nice dresses that would fit you."

“Oh good!” said Christina. “May I try them on?”

“Of course,” said mama, setting cups and saucers on the table. “I’ll just slip into the store and get them for you.”

Within a few minutes mama had returned to the kitchen with the three cotton housedresses folded under her arm. “These are all size forty-four,” she said, shaking out the first dress for Christina’s inspection. It was a multicolored print with a V-neck. But at the sight of it, Christina wrinkled up her nose. “Oh, I don’t fancy that!”

“Oh! Then how about this one?” asked mama, now shaking out the second dress. A bold plaid—green, yellow and red.

This time Christina was interested, and rising from her chair, she came closer to take a better look at it. “I’ll try that one on.”

Mama helped her pull her brown dress over her head, and Christina stood in her twisted slip, looking rather like a shorn sheep. First removing the straight pins from the dress, mama then proceeded to help Christina into it. She succeeded in getting it over her head, pulled it down over her shoulders, but something was wrong. At Christina’s hips, the dress halted and refused to go any further.

“Are you sure this is size forty-four?” said Christina, eyeing mama suspiciously.

Mama (who could read figures), peered down Christina’s back at the dress tag. “That’s what it says.”

“Well, they’ve made a mistake!” stated Christina indignantly. “Help me get it off, will you, Mrs. Siegel?”

Together the two women struggled for several minutes and finally they removed the dress from Christina. She stood then with her hair dishevelled and standing out in pointed grey wisps. One long strand of it hung annoyingly over her forehead, and pursing her lips, Christina blew at it. The unruly lock lifted for a moment and then flopped back in her eyes. “You’re sure you’re not expecting your husband back soon?” she asked, a little ruffled.

“Oh, positive!” mama reassured her. “He won’t be home till late. You know him. He waits for the last farmer before he buys anything.”

“Well, all right then,” said Christina. “Show me the other dress.”

Undaunted, mama shook out and removed the pins from the final dress, a black and white check patterned with red flowers. This is the last one anyway,” she said.

“All right, let’s try it on,” said Christina wearily.

Once more the two of them got to work. And this time the dress slipped easily over Christina, hips and all.

“Oh my! That’s lovely on you, Mrs. Badgeley,” cried mania. “Walk over to the mirror and see for yourself.”

Christina did as she was bade. Inquisitively she peered into the mirror over the sink, but all she could see in it was her own face and neck, and the dress where it covered her shoulders. “Well, it don’t seem too bad, I suppose,” she remarked, wiggling in it a little.

“I like it on you.” Mama gave her opinion quite freely.

“Do you think I can wear this neckline?” asked Christina, turning to mania doubtfully.

“Oh definitely!” asserted mama. “And the colour is good on you too! It brightens you up.”

“Oh, all right then. If you say so, Mrs. Siegel. How much is it?”

“Two dollars and sixty-nine cents.”

“Put it on the bill,” instructed Christina, now slipping out of it and pulling her brown dress over her head.

“Okay. Now let’s have our coffee. I’m anxious to see how you like my apple strudel.”

All this time, I worked away at my chemistry assignment, only occasionally raising my head.

“Now you’re sure you like that dress on me, Mrs. Siegel?” Christina asked again, as she and mama sat over their coffee and strudel.

“Yes, I do!” mama reaffirmed. “I think it’s a pet.”

But Christina was still not convinced. “And do you think I can wear that neckline? You’re sure it’s not too open for me, Mrs. Siegel?”

By now, mama had evidently had enough of Christina’s indecision, for when she next spoke, her voice sounded stern. “Mrs. Badgeley! You better take it! The colour is good on you. It brightens you up. But most important of all, it fits! After all, Mrs. Badgeley, you must take into consideration that you have a fat ass!”

I jumped in my chair. Wildly I looked from one to the other. But nothing seemed to be amiss. Christina, it was evident, had taken no offence. Indeed, there appeared to be not so much as a ripple in the calm sea of the two women’s friendship.

“Well, I suppose that’s true,” Christina reflected now. “And do you know something, Mrs. Siegel?”

“What, Mrs. Badgeley?”

“I never realized before what a really good saleslady you are. You’re good enough to work in one of them dress shops.”

Mama looked pleased. “Oh, do you think so, Mrs. Badgeley?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Well, it’s good of you to say so.”

“This is very good strudel. I like the spice in it, Mrs. Siegel.”

“Oh, do you? Eat it with good appetite, Mrs. Badgeley.”

A Vagrant

Saturday was the day when I helped mama and papa in the store. This particular Saturday, I remember, it was damp with a chill drizzle of rain. Although it was only ten past eight when I finished my breakfast, papa was already hard at work, trimming cabbages.

Before closing the store the night before, papa had noticed that some of the cabbage leaves were drying out and becoming discolored. Then and there, he had made up his mind that first thing the next day he would make the cabbages presentable. The bushel that he had purchased from the new farmer had not turned out to be such a bargain after all. The new farmer had a glib tongue, and it was against his better judgement that papa had bought the bushel without personally inspecting the cabbages at the bottom. Well, papa would not be so gullible next time.

The top layer had sold without any trouble. Then by the power of suggestion and her recipe for sweet-and-sour cabbage rolls thrown in, mama had managed to push another three or four. Finally, although Mrs. Badgeley had not ordered them, mama sent her two and added them on her bill. But fully half the bushel had not moved, and now in an effort to salvage what he could from the balance, papa was at work trimming leaves and cutting away the soiled portions. For this purpose he was using a butcher knife.

Mama went into the store for a few minutes and while she was there, she saw George’s bread wagon drawing up at the curb outside. Scanning the bread bin quickly, mama realized that we had enough bread. And wishing to spare the old man the trip from wagon to store in the sleet, she said to papa, “Oh Elia, we don’t need any bread today. Run to the door and summon George

not to come in. Hurry! It would be a pity to have him come out in the wet for nothing.” So saying, mama returned to the kitchen.

Papa did as he was bade. He quickly opened the door and standing in front of it, waited to catch the breadman’s eye. And so, just as George was about to alight with his breadbasket over his arm, he caught sight of papa barring the entrance to the store with a butcher knife! Unsure of what to do, George screwed up his old features and squinted at papa. And since George appeared so uncertain, papa proceeded to make himself more emphatic. Forgetting about the butcher knife in his hand, papa tried to convey to George that we didn’t need any bread. First papa held up his hand in a motion forbidding George to come any farther, and then he shook his head from side to side. When George put a tentative foot outside the wagon, papa made several slashing motions in the air with the knife.

George told mama about it on Monday. Needless to say, the whole effect on him was formidable. And deciding that it was downright unsafe to stop at Siegel’s that day, George took up his reins and hastened on his way.

After George drove off, papa closed the door and returned to the cabbages. He was still working over them when Mr. McGillivray came into the store. By this time, mama had taken her place behind the counter, and the condiment salesman raised his eyes to her, as he began his wan recital.

“Salt, mustard, vinegar, pepper.

Vanilla, paprika, allspice, thyme.

Cloves, cinnamon, sour salt, nutmeg.

Baking powder, baking soda, extract of lime...”

Suddenly the bell rang, and all at once the man was there. He seemed to have come out of nowhere, but there he was at the vegetable counter, towering over papa! Of gigantic stature, he wore neither a coat nor a jacket, and his torn wool shirt revealed a broad hairy chest. Wind and sun had burned the rough planes of his face,

and he had a grizzled beard. His eyes appeared like two burning coals.

Catching sight of the barrel of herring on the floor, he breathed the words, “Give me fish.” But papa, the eternal penny pincher, hesitated. Turning to a bushel nearby, papa stooped over and picked out two bruised apples. “Here, take these instead.”

Mama, who was casually fingering the wares in Mr. McGillivray’s suitcase, cast a sharp eye upon the goings-on on papa’s side of the store.”Just a moment, Mr. McGillivray,” she said, and quickly moved around her counter to where papa and the giant man stood. She took a paper bag from a pile handy on the fruit counter, extracted two large herrings from the barrel, placed them on the bag and handed it to the vagrant. Within seconds he wolfed them down, his strong teeth tearing the meat of the herring from the bones. Mama silently then placed the two bruised apples in his hand. He wheeled around abruptly and stalked out of the store, slamming the door behind him.

And now, as Mr. McGillivray stood by and I watched from the back of the store, once again mama and papa stood glaring at each other from the opposite sides of the ever-present gulf between them.

The sight of hungry vagrants was no novelty to papa.”Herring are expensive, Rachel,” he brooded.

But mama was furious. With that obstinacy against which papa had no defence, mama strode to her side of the store and turning the full force of her dark features upon Mr. McGillivray, in tones clear and vindictive, she demanded, “Mr. McGillivray, get out your order book!”

At her words, the salesman brightened. Then he hastily placed his order book on the counter and reached for the pencil in his vest pocket. Studiously ignoring the angry look papa turned on her, mama rapped out the words, “Write as follows: one half-dozen salt, one half-dozen mustard, one half-dozen vinegar, one half-

dozen pepper, one half-dozen paprika, one half-dozen allspice, one half-dozen vanilla and one half-dozen thyme!”

As quickly as he could, Mr. McGillivray wrote down the order. He shaped his thin lips into a smile. “With the commission from this order,” he said, “I’d like to buy some tobacco for my brother and myself, Mrs. Siegel. Let me have two small packs of Old Chum, please, and two packages of cigarette papers.”

“Oh yes,” mama added in her spite, “and one half-dozen baking soda, one half-dozen baking powder and one-half-dozen extract of lime.”

“In that case,” replied Mr. McGillivray, “make it two large packs of Old Chum.”

When the front door closed behind Mr. McGillivray, papa spoke out. “Do you feel better now that you’ve sunk thirty dollars on merchandise we won’t sell in five years?”

“Yes!” replied mama, nodding her head for emphasis. “Much better! I feel like a sport!”

That did it. Papa was allergic to this particular word and all that it implied. “Then you should be married to one,” papa replied contemptuously. “A sport would not work like a dog, plan, twist his brains day and night to make a living. No! You would give everything away and you’d both starve!”

Mama’s anger had as yet not abated and without hesitation, she flung her answer at him. “We wouldn’t starve, and it would be better than being married to a *schnorrer*! And I’ll tell you why. Because a *schnorrer* has his vision blocked, don’t you know, by his *schnorring*! And his judgment comes out of him all cock-eyed. And then one day out of a man a *schnorrer* has become a stone! A stone, do you hear? And he refuses food to a starving man!”

Papa held up a hand. This argument had turned out to be more than he had bargained for. It was seldom that mama’s wrath was so aroused, and I knew that it disturbed papa to see the pallor on mama’s thin lips. “Rachel, Rachel,” he said, mopping his brow,

“that’s enough! Why should a *mizzuble* tramp come between us?” By now, papa’s quick anger was on the wane. He spoke mildly now. “Do you know something? I’m feeling a little hungry, and I’d enjoy a piece of that nice *gefilte* fish you made yesterday, with a little horseradish.”

“Well, you can just get it for yourself!” replied mama. For it took her anger far longer to be aroused than papa’s, but once aroused, it did not abate so easily.

Without risking another word, papa hastened past me to the kitchen, where he stayed until the bell had rung several times and mama summoned him back to his place at the vegetable counter.

A little later, mama turned to me wearily. “Oh Sophie, if I could only write,” she said.

“What would you write, mama?”

“Sophie, if I could write,” said mama, “I would write a letter to the editor! Yes, that’s what I would do. I would write a letter to the editor. Such a letter that he would put it in the paper, so everybody should know how bitter it is for a woman to be married to a stingy man!”

A Mother's Heartache

So far as I could make out, the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Yukel Baldovich had been a stormy one from the outset. Then as the years went by, it had gradually progressed into one long unremitting quarrel. Until eighteen months ago, when they had hit upon the ideal solution. By mutual consent, Yukel and his wife ceased to speak to each other altogether. When communication was absolutely necessary, one of the children served as go-between.

Every evening after the interminable chaos of mealtime, the couple would sit in the kitchen, enjoying the relative quiet of their household. And they would read. In stony silence they would place two kitchen chairs back-to-back and sit down, each concentrating on his or her half of the paper. In a little while, as if by a pre-arranged signal, their right arms would go up simultaneously and they would exchange sections. Thus they would sit every night and share the Jewish paper.

To Yukel and his wife this seemed a fine working arrangement. And if their children were less than pleased with it, why then, they did not allow such a trifling consideration to influence them. In point of fact, their older son Harvey, their daughter-in-law Sheila and their teenage daughter Faye all thought it a miserable plan. Granted it was an improvement over the former situation, and admittedly the house was much quieter; but as far as they were concerned, it was still no good.

Yukel Baldovich did not happen to be among the unemployed of the city. He had a position. Although it did not consistently pay well, still Yukel was satisfied. He felt that he had at least found his niche in the business world. He was employed in the garment section as errand boy for a Jewish delicatessen. He received no

salary for his services, but worked for tips. These ranged anywhere from \$2.00 to \$4.50 per week, and although by some standards this might not be considered a large income, it was enough for Yukel. Enough anyway for him to pay his board.

During the early thirties, there was a popular Jewish song, the lyrics of which Yukel had committed to memory. There were some people who even suspected that the song had been inspired by Yukel to begin with. Certainly it appeared that the songwriter had him in mind when he had composed the song. The name of it was "Ich Bin ein Boarder bei mein Weib." Undoubtedly the lyrics applied to him, for no man ever paid board more conscientiously than Yukel Baldovich. Regular as clockwork, Yukel paid his board to his wife. If he hadn't, his conscience would not have been clear.

Yukel estimated that his personal upkeep cost his wife forty-eight cents a day, or \$3.36 per week. Then he contributed an extra nickel for his half of the newspaper, which brought the grand total to \$3.41. To the finest decimal point he had worked it out, even including such items as his share of the firewood and soap chips for his laundry. He took into consideration that he was a small eater and he never smoked.

If sometimes the delicatessen should have a slow week and hence tips were scarce, then Yukel would borrow—go to any lengths—to make up the difference between what he earned and his board. He always met his obligations. His board was always paid. This was as far as his responsibility went. The expenses incurred by his children, his teenage daughter and his five-year-old son, did not concern him at all. Once he had paid his \$3.41, his mind was at rest.

The money that Mrs. Baldovich received from her son Harvey was the mainstay of the family. Harvey was serving a drugstore apprenticeship and he earned \$12.50 per week, \$10 of which he turned over to his mother. Since Harvey's wife was unable to nurse the baby, the \$10 had to be stretched to include food for the infant.

Of all the heartaches that Mrs. Baldovich was subject to, of all the burdens that hung like stones around her neck and contributed towards her hunched-over posture, her son's marriage was the heaviest. And now added to this burden was the heartache that Sheila was unable to nurse. Mrs. Baldovich's path as a mother-in-law was strewn with many thorns, but none was more painful than this. At the time of the child's birth, Sheila had not been in hospital twenty-four hours before it was discovered that she had inverted nipples and would never nurse any child. But besides the additional expense, besides all that, to Mrs. Baldovich's way of thinking the whole business just wasn't respectable. And to whom, to whom, could she open her heart and relieve herself of this burden she carried within her.

By his folly, Harvey had embittered his mother's character, although it should be pointed out that it had never been sweet. Secretly Mrs. Baldovich had envisioned a brilliant marriage for her son. To a girl with money! It was true that he was not 'learning for' a doctor or a lawyer, nor yet a dentist. But other druggists had married well. Girls from fine homes, with good fat dowries. Girls whose fathers set up a young graduate in business for himself. And were glad to do it too!

She simply could not understand it. How her Harvey, her golden Harvey, the star in her heaven, her sensible Harvey, her good student, her pride and joy, her bright Harvey who could play the piano without ever having had a lesson, could have done this to her. Every time Mrs. Baldovich looked at Sheila, so thin and colourless, inwardly she wept. And with each passing day, her shoulders grew heavier; more and more she bent forward; and lower and lower drooped her arms.

Although Mrs. Baldovich had felt her displacement in his affections when her son first married, still for a while she had comforted herself with the thought that it wasn't getting a man that was the acid test, but keeping him. And it had remained to be seen if Sheila could keep Harvey. But now, Mrs. Baldovich could feel it

in her bones, things were getting worse. She was losing ground with her son every day, for contrary to her prophecies, the young couple got along very well. In fact, they appeared to be genuinely in love.

Dinner Hour at the Baldoviches

Faye Baldovich was a familiar sight in our kitchen. And I was no stranger in the Baldovich household either. As a matter of fact, I had been there so often that no one paid any particular attention to me. If I happened to be sitting in the kitchen at mealtime, Mrs. Baldovich often as not automatically shoved a plate of food at me, along with the one she placed under her daughter's nose.

It was not the policy of the family to take their meals together, but as hunger struck individually. Consequently, mealtime at 247 Sumach Street lasted anywhere from one to four hours.

One dinner hour when I was there, little Arala came in and with his chin cupped sullenly in his hands, sat himself at the table. "Give me eat!" he demanded. Arala was a picky eater.

"Beh! Do you want a meatball and a smashed potato?" asked Mrs. Baldovich.

"If there's no onion in it."

"There's no onion in it, there's no onion in it."

Arala acquiesced, and Mrs. Baldovich brought over to the table a plate on which was a mashed potato, a meatball, a slice of rye bread and a fork. But Arala did not eat. Instead he sat picking out the onion from the meatball and placing it in a little soggy heap on the side of his plate.

"Why don't you eat, big shot?" snapped Mrs. Baldovich.

"I don't want it."

"What's the matter?"

"It's got onion in it."

"Are you crazy or are you making yourself crazy? It's got no onion in it." Wordlessly Arala pointed to the onions on the side of his plate.

"So!" cried Mrs. Baldovich, looking to me of all people for sympathy. "Could you cook a meatball without onions, I ask you? Without onions, what taste would it have?"

But Arala adamantly shook his head.

"Beh! Do you want soup? Good barley soup! "Again Arala shook his head.

"Meh! A 'panana'?"

"Uh-uh!"

"Beh! Meh! So what do you want?"

"Fish and chips!"

"Are you crazy or are you making yourself crazy? Have a plate barley soup!"

"Fish and chips! I want fish and chips!"

From the sugar bowl that stood on the stove, Mrs. Baldovich extracted a dime and handed it to her son. "All right, beh! Get fish and chips, but don't tell nobody."

During this whole familiar sequence, I noticed that Harvey Baldovich sat morosely at the kitchen table, with his cheeks burrowed deep into his hands. His thick hair was tousled so that his eyes were not visible. Nevertheless, he was viewing the goings-on about him through the spreading fingers of his hands. The scene was not new to Faye or me either.

By this time Sheila had helped Mrs. Baldovich wash up the dishes after Harvey's meal, and the two women stood side by side, preparing the baby's formula. Four bottles were ranged on the stove in a neat row; the saucepan of milk had been brought to a boil, and Sheila was in the process of pouring the milk into the bottles.

"Make sure you pour them even," said Mrs. Baldovich over Sheila's shoulder. Sure enough, by the time Sheila reached the third bottle, her hand shook so that she tipped the bottle with the saucepan. The warm milk spilled over the stove and trickled down its side onto the floor. Sheila flashed her mother-in-law a frantic look, and Mrs. Baldovich stood, livid, with her lips pressed tightly together.

"I'm so sorry!" cried Sheila. "I'll get a rag and mop it up."

"Beh! Meh! Where will you get a rag? Leave it. I'll mop it up." From the bedroom down the hall we heard the sharp hungry cry of the baby. At the sound of it, Mrs. Baldovich started. It always alarmed her to hear the baby cry. "Go to the child!" she demanded.

"I will in a minute, mother," said Sheila. "As soon as I fill the other bottle,"

"Go right now!" ordered Mrs. Baldovich. "Don't you hear? The child is crying!"

Sheila fled from the room, and Harvey continued to sit motionless. He did not utter a word. Just then his father came in, and the real drama of the evening began.

As he sat down at the table, Yukel addressed Harvey. "You could tell my landlady that I am ready to eat." Yukel stuttered a little.

Mrs. Baldovich now served him. First placing a knife, fork and spoon on the table, she set before him a plate on which was a potato and a portion of boiled beef. Then she returned to the stove.

In a little while Yukel addressed his son once more. "You could tell my landlady that I couldn't eat raw meat. Tell her I am not Tarzan."

"You could tell my *bickidicker* boarder that he could eat by the delicatessen."

"And you could tell my landlady that my board is paid up." At this point a loud squawk came from the other room. Mrs. Baldovich winced; then dipping her finger into a small saucepan on the stove, she took out a rubber nipple and pulled it onto one of the bottles of milk. "Beh! Meh! She must a stuck him with a pin!" she declared. And off she hurried down the hall to the screaming child, muttering as she went, "The mothers of today, beh! The mothers of today, men! The mothers of today, beh! men!"

This was the opportunity that Harvey was waiting for. Now slipping from his chair, he took his coat and hat and stole quietly from the room. He tiptoed past the bedroom where he could hear his mother scolding, and vanished out the front door.

Harvey's absence did not escape his mother's notice, when she returned to serve her husband the balance of his meal. I knew because Mrs. Baldovich was muttering something to this effect. By now Arala was back and seated at the table with his fish and chips, wrapped in a newspaper.

The baby was quietened, the milk on the floor mopped up and over at the table her husband was finishing his meal. Now Mrs. Baldovich could give herself up to her pressing thoughts. What new idiocy was this, she wondered out loud in a sort of doleful chant, that every night Harvey vanished from the house? A new story! Where could it be he went on these evening expeditions? She knew that once he slipped out, he would not return until after the house was in darkness and all was quiet. Like a burglar, Harvey at a late hour returned and walked in his stocking feet, carrying his shoes in his hand. The best she could hope for was that he would not yet wallow in jail!

Two or three days later, I met Harvey on the street. Consumed with curiosity, I stopped and asked about those nights. Harvey came right out with it. In fact, he seemed glad to have someone to confide in.

Harvey longed to come home from work and to be alone with Sheila and the baby. But this, he could see, was not to be. And when he was exposed to the general pandemonium of the household, the hostility between his parents and most particularly, the badgering of his wife by his mother, he couldn't bear it. So when his mother's back was turned, he made his escape.

Mrs. Baldovich need not have concerned herself over the criminal tendencies of her son. Had she followed him on one of his mysterious escapades, she would not have had far to walk. For night after night Harvey went no farther than the restaurant at the

corner of Parliament and Dundas Streets where, first purchasing an evening newspaper, he sat all alone in a booth at the back. He drank cup after cup of coffee and read the paper. He didn't even smoke.

A Salesman

In the late winter of 1935, the majority of our customers were on government relief. A few paid for their purchases in cash. And of the balance most were indebted to mama and papa in varying amounts. These were the steady customers, the families of employed factory workers and here and there a skilled man such as a carpenter or a plumber. All week long the steady customers bought on credit. On Saturday night they paid their bill and splurging a little, purchased a weekend order on next week's bill.

From time to time, however, the breadwinner of such a family would lose his job. Only rarely did the man have any savings to fall back on, and so when he lost his job, he was automatically broke. When this happened and the family went on relief immediately, it constituted for papa what he considered half a *tzore*. For although, to be sure, the current bill was to remain outstanding, still papa had the consolation of receiving the customer's relief voucher. A whole *tzore* in papa's estimation was the case of the steady customer, who although now unemployed, considered government relief as charity and was too proud to have anything to do with it. Such a customer was guilty of presenting papa with a dilemma that kept him awake nights.

Should he extend credit, papa would agonize, and run the risk of a mounting unpaid bill on the books, or should he refuse and lose the current bill and the customer too? Papa tossed and turned. Any way he looked at it, it was a gamble. Then again, papa believed it was a good business tactic to take a gamble once in a while. Papa would consider each case on its merits. And so, if a man had a reasonably good background of employment, and was of sound character—in other words, if he stayed home nights with

his family and had the-self control to walk past the corner beer parlour on payday without being drawn in—papa might take a chance on him.

One customer on whom papa had so gambled was a young salesman, with a shock of blond hair and a toothy grin, by the name of Lloyd Campbell. The Campbell family occupied the whitewashed cottage that stood directly across the street from the store. Although it contained only four rooms, and although in places the stucco was visibly missing from its exterior, still the cottage was a rather picturesque little place. Set back from the street on a corner lot, it boasted two giant oak trees. These twin oaks, that some farsighted Torontonians had planted a century earlier, were the only such venerable trees on the block. And it was just possible that the street that they so incongruously adorned, had originally derived its name from them.

As was the case with many a rented house in the neighbourhood, the cottage was the property of an estate, that most mysterious and impersonal of owners, and all business dealings were done through a trust company. Unlike the hapless landlords of privately owned Cabbagetown dwellings, to whom a man could appeal in person for an extension of credit, trust companies never waited long for their money. No, acting in the interest of their clients, trust companies lost only one month's rent and the tenant knew that well within one month of his default, he could expect to be notified by mail of his forthcoming eviction.

The Campbells had been our steady customers for two years when Lloyd was let out of his most recent selling job. That day Lloyd had crossed the street, accompanied by his two small children, and hat in hand, had requested that papa tide him over until he found another job.

Papa had not replied right away. While mama had looked on hopefully, papa had stood soberly pondering the pros and cons of Lloyd's chances of re-employment. While he was thus absorbed in his speculations, papa allowed himself only a furtive look at Lloyd's

children, for unlike mama, papa harboured no responsibility to a man simply because he was in need. With papa it was strictly a matter of business. But then, papa knew that Lloyd had in turn sold insurance, aluminum pots and pans, and more recently, encyclopaedias. Upon due deliberation, he decided that such a serious young man was worthy of a gamble. And he consented to extend Lloyd's credit for the period when he should be temporarily unemployed. Later, papa suspected that he had erred in his judgement and that his calculations, painstaking though they were, had been faulty. And Lloyd, now in papa's debt in the amount of some twenty-seven dollars, was not unaware of the resentful glances cast in his direction by his storekeeper every time he entered the store for an order.

This morning, then, as thin rays of early March sunlight seeped through the windows of Toronto's Cabbagetown, Lloyd did not cross the street until he saw papa's retreating figure, as papa made his way down Sumach Street, bent against the wind, his arms laden with groceries.

Lloyd found mama alone in the store. She was arranging canned goods on the shelves in back of the long counter. When she glimpsed at him over her shoulder, mama could tell right away that something was wrong. She must be careful how she spoke to him, she thought, for she knew him to be a sensitive young fellow at the best of times. Lloyd often chatted with mama, and I know that mama was worried about him. The young salesman was having a very difficult time finding work, and it troubled mama to see him so gloomy and discouraged over it.

"Good morning, Mr. Campbell," mama said now. "How would you like a nice hot cup of coffee today? Just for a change I put a dash of cinnamon in it this morning. Some people say, you know, that a dash of cinnamon makes all the difference."

"No, no thank you, Mrs. Siegel. Not today." Lloyd's voice was so low that mama had to strain her ears to hear it. Then he simply stood there, not saying anything. He appeared lost in

thought. Since the bleak afternoon when Lloyd had been released from his third selling job of the current year, he had spent his days wearily job-hunting. Each morning he would take the time to have coffee in our kitchen; then he would set out with his list of encircled advertisements and systematically apply at one address after another.

At most places he was turned down immediately, but once in a while he was asked to take a seat and wait to be interviewed. At such times Lloyd's heart would fairly leap in his breast, and as he waited in the anteroom, he would say to himself, "This is it! The break I've been waiting for!"

To pass the time while he waited, Lloyd liked to daydream. He found it pleasant to let his mind race forward almost of its own accord, and picture himself being greeted by a distinguished gentleman on the other side of the closed door. He fancied that this was to be his employer—a mellowed, perceptive person with a soft voice, who would be quick to recognize Lloyd as the perfect man for the job. Then, to expedite matters further, this worldly and astute individual would advance him the money for the down payment on a car. This would start the ball rolling. For Lloyd had learned through bitter experience that good selling jobs, steady, year-round jobs with established firms, selling accepted household products or popular clothing lines, went only to salesmen with cars. Young men not unlike himself, but with one major difference—they had no transportation difficulties.

This tendency of his to spin daydreams while he waited would sometimes allow his imagination to carry him to quite farfetched boundaries. Before long he would be making real money, he fancied. He would pay all his bills and buy some decent clothes for his wife, Irene, and the children. As a matter of fact, this very day he would insist that Irene go out and purchase a complete maternity wardrobe for herself. And that she throw away every last one of the old dresses and skirts, the seams of which had been let out and taken in twice before. When Irene and the children had

everything they needed, he would think about buying himself a new suit, a pair of shoes—perhaps even two pairs of shoes.

In time, he would find a nice place for them all to move into. A respectable solid brick house somewhere, one that was not draughty and where the children wouldn't have so many colds. A house preferably on a tree-lined street, in a district geared for raising children. A tidy district, with no garbage cans confronting one's eyes at every turn, nor so many ownerless dogs forever overturning the garbage cans in a constant search for food. Nor dogfights, nor cats wailing in the night, a district that was cheerful and bright, not grey and depressing. Not a district where it seemed that everything, even the snow, was the colour of mud.

He would become the ideal husband and father. A good provider, and thoughtful. On birthdays and anniversaries he would never fail to send flowers to Irene. And from time to time he would surprise her with little presents for no reason at all, other than he wanted to buy her something.

Of course, his daydream was destined to remain futile, for the outcome of his interview was always disappointing. Each time the man behind the desk turned out to be neither mellow nor soft-spoken. Nor for that matter, was he particularly distinguished looking. He was more apt to be simply busy, impersonal and to speak emphatically, precisely to the point. When the unsuccessful interview was at an end and Lloyd found himself outside in the hall, it took all the strength he could muster to fight back the tears. He would then take his lead pencil and his list of advertisements from his pocket, cross out the present address and head for the next one.

Ah, but if he had a car! What a boost to his floundering self-esteem it would be to reply in the affirmative to the inevitable question! Whichever way he turned, there was no escaping it. If he was to have a future in the business world, he had to have a car. He absolutely had to have a car! It became an obsession with him and a constant nagging frustration. This, complicated by the ever

diminishing number of small bills in his wallet in the face of his family's increasing needs, weighed so heavily on his mind that he was fast approaching the breaking point.

He brooded a lot. More and more frequently he became depressed. Most mornings he woke up feeling panicky, without courage to face the day—tired before he began, and unsure of his ability to sell, even should he find a job.

Nor was this all. He had no control over the weeping any more. Every morning after he had kissed Irene and the children goodbye for the day, just as he reached the front door, it would happen. The very moment he was about to set foot out of the house, a sense of panic would seize him and he would burst into tears. Right there at the door before his wife's troubled eyes! It devastated him to have Irene see him like this, a grown man crying on his wife's shoulder because he was afraid to go out of the house. "I don't know what comes over me, Irene," he would stammer. "But I'm sure I'll be all right in a few minutes. It's just getting started."

During one interview last week, he had become overwrought. As he stood before the white-faced stranger in horned-rimmed glasses who questioned him, Lloyd was conscious only of his heart pounding loudly in his ears, And before he realized what he was doing, he had grasped the man by his hands and in a shrill voice, had screamed, "Oh please, don't ask me any more questions! Don't ask me if I have a car! Surely you can understand that some people are too poor to have a car. Poor and in debt, with a couple of small kids and a wife who's expecting..."

The white-faced man, confronted with the look of ruin on Lloyd's face, looked away quickly. And very slowly he withdrew his hands from Lloyd's grasp. When he spoke, the tone of his voice was not unkind. And not unkindly he informed Lloyd that he was very sorry but at the present time he had nothing for him.

After that interview, Lloyd became steadily worse. Since then he wept more often. Although he despised himself for it, the tears were likely to well up in his eyes at random and stream down

his face. And there was Irene with her arms around him, gently smoothing his hair and cradling him as if he were a child.

"Oh Irene, I'm so ashamed!"

With her cheek pressing against his hair, Irene held him tight. "Please listen to me for a moment, darling! We won't starve. Nobody starves in Canada. All we have to do is go on relief, like lots of other people do nowadays. It's nothing for you to be ashamed of."

"No, Irene," Lloyd replied miserably. "We're not going on relief. That's out!"

"Oh Lloyd," Irene insisted. "It won't be as bad as you think. And it will only be temporary. You can make your application for relief on Monday morning and then you can look for another job."

That night as he lay sleepless in his darkened room, Lloyd thought bitterly. Here he was, Lloyd Campbell, free, white, twenty-nine years old, family man. Canadian born, of Anglo-Saxon origin, able-bodied, ambitious, intelligent, high-school matriculant. And Monday he could make his application for relief first thing in the morning and then look for another job. Face yet another flinty-eyed receptionist, perhaps be asked to wait alongside other similarly unemployed seedy-looking salesmen, then wait doggedly, only to be told that there was nothing for him.

And that wasn't all. In another two weeks' time, when his rent was thirty days overdue, he could look forward to having his family thrown out on the street.

Lloyd slept very little that night. For in the darkness, at long last he saw clearly. It had meant so much to him to succeed as a salesman that he had blotted everything else from his mind. He had allowed himself to sink very low on account of it. But this was as far as he would go.

In all the years since he had left his father's farm, although the two men had corresponded, Lloyd had never divulged the fact that he could not make a living. But tonight he would face the

truth. And he would throw away his dreams of a selling career and start over again. Lloyd knew what he had to do. At dawn he had to write his father to tell him that he needed his help. That if he could offer a roof over the heads of his family and provide them with enough food and milk, he would henceforth be happy to work that tired old farm from morning till night.

The letter from his father arrived by the next mail. The old widower assured his son that he and his family were welcome to anything he had, although, to be sure, it wasn't much. But he did have a little home, a good milking cow and an ample vegetable garden. He promised Lloyd that he would meet them at the station. And he enclosed two one-way tickets to Moosehorn, Manitoba.

"So could I help you with anything?"

All at once Lloyd became aware of mama's voice breaking in on his thoughts. And he realized that it was coming to him from across the counter in the grocery store. He lifted his head then and faced her.

"Mrs. Siegel, I have a favour to ask of you."

"That's okay," mama readily agreed.

"I want you to make a phone call for me. On Monday, to the finance company. I'll give you the number."

"Okay."

"They're going to come and take away our furniture, and I want to leave the key with you, so they can get into the house." Mama's eyes opened wide, but she waited for him to go on. "You see, Mrs. Siegel, my wife and I and the children... we're moving away today. We're moving to my father's farm in Manitoba,"

"You're all moving to Manitoba today," mama repeated.

If I knew mama, she stood there with that soft eager look of hers, and Lloyd Campbell must have longed to confide in her. To share his thoughts with her as he might have shared them with his own mother, had his mother been alive. Besides, it must have been important to him to justify his actions to her, and that she

understand why he was leaving Toronto so suddenly, without paying her the money he owed her.

"Don't be afraid, sonny. You could tell Mrs. Siegel."

Before many minutes had passed, Lloyd had related to mama the details of the last month, of the futile job-seeking, the sleepless nights, the wretched weeping spells, of his loss of confidence in himself and of his wife's efforts to keep smiling and to cheer him up. He told her also of his thwarted ambitions, of his vain dreams, of the letter he had written to his father and finally of the reply he had received this morning.

"But why are you leaving so soon, Mr. Campbell?" asked mama. "What's your rush? I'm sure the train tickets will keep for a couple of days. In a couple of days you and your wife would have a chance to getting everything ready for such a big move."

"We haven't any time to lose, Mrs. Siegel," Lloyd answered in little more than a whisper. "There's a train leaving from the Union Station at three o'clock this afternoon, and we have to be on it, that's all!"

Mama understood. If he had no time to lose, that meant only one thing. He was down to his last dollar.

"I'm just a miserable failure," Lloyd said wretchedly. "I've never provided for my family properly, and now I'm crawling back to my father for help. And him just a small farmer himself."

"But big enough to looking out for you in a pinch," mama pointed out.

"Well, anyway," Lloyd sighed, "what I really came in for was to say goodbye to you, and to tell you that we won't be able to pay you the twenty-seven dollars we owe you."

It may have surprised him to note with what little concern mama greeted his announcement. "Well, it's very nice of you to telling me," she replied. "Mrs. Siegel is not used to so much consideration."

Lloyd clenched his fists. "Mrs. Siegel, I'll send you the money the first chance I get! You understand that, don't you?"

Taking note of his clenched fists, mama fixed Lloyd with her steady gaze. “Now would you like to listening to me for a minute, sonny?” she said. “I’m a few years older than you, you know, and I have had lots of experience in this little world of ours. Good and bad, hot and cold. And the best advice I could give an honest man like you is: take it easy! Because, take it from me, easy does it! And there is no advantage in making yourself sick neither! This I can absolutely guarantee you!” She slipped a pencil and a sheet of paper into Lloyd’s hand. “You have no right to thinking of yourself as a failure,” she went on, “because nowadays when a man is unemployed, it means only one thing. That he’s in a great big boat, with lots of other people to keeping him company.”

Lloyd held up the pencil. “Mrs. Siegel, what’s this for?”

As he contemplated her now, I surmise that Lloyd became aware of an odd expression in mama’s eyes. It was an expression that perhaps he had not seen there before. But I had, many times.

“To write with, what do you think?” mama snapped. “Because, if you want to know, I can’t read or write at all!” When Lloyd stared at her, mama went on sharply. “What’s the matter? Do you think you’re the only one in the world who can feel ashamed? Cheap and ashamed?”

“But Mrs. Siegel,” Lloyd cried, “not being able to read and write is nothing to be ashamed of.”

“It’s nothing to be proud of neither, you could take my word for it! Now come on, let’s get to work! Because if you’re going on a train all the way to Manitoba with a pregnant wife and two small children, you’re going to needing some groceries! “She handed him a sheet of paper and a pencil; and a moment later, she added with a business-like air, “Now mind you’re keeping track of what you take, because when my daughter comes home from school, she’s going to adding everything on your bill!”

In spite of himself, Lloyd was grinning now. And straightening his shoulders, he faced mama squarely. A moment later, I know, their eyes met unblinkingly across the counter of the grocery store,

across the span of a generation, across the distance of divergent backgrounds and faiths, met and held in mutual understanding and compassion.

Within the space of five minutes she filled two large bags to capacity. She put in two loaves of bread, a pound of butter, a package of cheese, a jar of jam, a head of lettuce, sliced meat, two quarts of milk, apples, oranges, a package of arrowroot biscuits. As she placed each article into the bag, she called out the price and Lloyd quickly jotted it all down on the sheet of paper. When the bags were full, no doubt as a finishing touch, mama added a package of cigarettes. “And one package cigarettes—twenty-cents,” she said with a flourish. “Now shake a leg and get out of here before my husband gets back from the deliveries and gives me the dickens!”

At the door, Lloyd paused for only a moment. He took one last lingering look about the store. Then, turning to mama, he said, “Mrs. Siegel, how can I ever thank you?”

“Don’t!” replied mama. “What I do for you is a mitzvah. Do you know what a mitzvah is, sonny?”

Lloyd nodded. “Yes, I think so. It’s charity. Charity in the truest sense of the word.”

As was her custom, mama held the door open for her customer. And as Lloyd walked out, he said, “I’ll send you the money some day, Mrs. Siegel. Don’t worry.”

I’m sure that Lloyd was not soon to forget the look on mama’s face, nor the little smile that touched her lips as she answered. “I’m not worried, sonny. Mrs. Siegel will never die rich. And I’ll tell you something else. She don’t give a damn!”

With the door ajar, mama stood watching as he crossed the street. And when she turned from the door, mama banged it. Hard! She banged it so hard that the little bell at the top jangled furiously for quite a long time.

As I entered the bills that evening, I found myself wondering about the serious young salesman who didn’t have a car. And about mama and her mitzvahs.

A Cousin from Germany

When I came home from school one afternoon, I found mama's face flushed with excitement. "Oh Sophie, I'm so glad you're home! Don't take off your coat yet, dear, because I want you should run a message for me. Go right away and tell Mrs. Badgeley that I don't know for how long, but I think I have a tenant for her extra room. Say it's my cousin from Germany."

My eyes travelled the length and breadth of the store. "Your cousin from Germany! Where?"

"He's in the kitchen having same coffee. But go first and tell Mrs. Badgeley that I'll be bringing him over tonight, to sleep. He brought suitcases, so it must be he's expecting to stay." Then, turning, mama addressed papa who was standing at the vegetable counter with a very disgruntled look on his face. "And you don't need to worry, Elia. You'll see. Everything will be all right. The boy will be fine by Mrs. Badgeley, and Mrs. Badgeley will be tickled pink to doing me a favour."

"All I want to know," said papa, scowling, "is what wind blows them all to us? From where did this one get our address?"

"From my sister, most likely," replied mama. "When Meema Channa was alive, Esther used to writing to her all the time. And now every once in a while Esther gets a Yiddish letter from Harry."

"If your cousin Harry is so friendly with your sister, how come he sends his son to us? How come he doesn't send him to Esther?"

"Oh, that's because I'm the oldest," stated mama. "When our parents died and we children went to live by Meema Channa, I was already a big girl fifteen years old. You know that, Elia. Nathan was

thirteen and Esther was only eleven." Papa rolled his eyes upwards. "That's not the reason!" he snapped. "The reason is that you are Rachel and Esther is Esther, and your whole *mispochah* knows it. If not, why should every relative who shows up in Canada come straight to us?"

My first impression of Hans Stern was of a little boy lost. With his red-blond hair, great sad eyes and vulnerable expression, to me he had the appeal of a child, even though he was twenty-three or twenty-four years old. He had a thin face and a sharp Semitic profile—prominent nose, a rather jutting chin and tightly waving hair that sloped back from a high forehead. I found him shy, and the European cut of his tweed jacket appeared odd. But he was very nice, I thought, and I tried to keep my mouth from dropping open as he courteously rose to shake my hand. And there was something about his face that troubled me—something about the grim set of his jaw and the brooding sadness of his brown eyes.

With the introduction out of the way, mama promptly proceeded to monopolize the conversation. "I would have sworn," she marveled, "that the driver made a mistake when he stopped the taxi in front of our store! I thought for sure he was looking for another Siegel. But when Hans walked in and I saw his face, I thought I would faint away altogether! It was like my Meema Channa came back to life. The same eyes, the same nose, the same golden hair!" Mama covered her heart with her hands and she looked at Hans amiably. "Oh Hans, you had a lovely grandmother! I'll never forget that woman. She was more than an aunt, she was a second mother to me. And I wouldn't forget your father either. What a young man he was, as good as gold, and with such a sweet mouth to talk. I loved all my cousins, but of the three boys Harry, Joe and Meyer, Harry was always my favorite!"

“I think you must be his favorite cousin also, Tante Rachel, because when he decided that I must leave Germany, he sent me to you without hesitation.” Hans spoke in soft cultured tones, and despite his accent, in the most beautiful English I had ever heard in my life.

“You mean to say,” said mama, suddenly very serious, “that your father sent you to Canada, on purpose, to me?”

“That is correct, Tante Rachel. He said that you would understand me, and that you would know what to do for me.”

“What else did he say?” said mama, and watching her face, I noted the confusion in her eyes.

“He did not explain it,” said Hans simply.

“But I can’t imagine why he said that,” mama insisted.

“Perhaps he meant that you would understand about my writing,” Hans suggested.

“You write, Hans?” said mama, for the time being plucking out of the conversation the one aspect that appealed to her imagination. “What things do you write?”

“Oh, I write about many things, Tante Rachel. Articles and stories and some poems.” Then he hesitated rather self-consciously. “But you see, although I write, I am not at all sure that my writing is good. I know only that my thoughts press against my brain until I must write them down. And even though I do not know if I am able, I mean also to write a book.”

“Well, I understand that, all right,” said mama as her eyes filled with admiration. “I certainly wish you good luck with everything you write, Hans. But, if you don’t mind, I would like to ask you about something else. I heard the other day about a law in Germany that Jewish people are not allowed to holding a public office. Is that true?”

As mama and I watched him carefully, we saw a frown gather between Hans’s blond eyebrows. “It is true,” he answered, unsmiling/”There are many such laws in Germany today.”

Mama wanted to hear news of Hans’s parents. “Tell me everything!” she urged. “Tell me about your mother! I was never fortunate enough to meeting her, you know. I was here in Canada already two years when I heard that your father married a beautiful German girl and moved to Berlin to live. But maybe I could get to knowing your mother through you. Wouldn’t that be nice? And Hans, tell me all about your father. I understand that he has done well in business. I’m not surprised, you know. Your father always had a good head for business even when he was a young boy.”

It was peculiar, but suddenly our guest appeared to wilt before our eyes. I hadn’t noticed before how tired he was. But I noticed it now and also how his jaw hardened, as darting a painful look in mama’s direction, he mumbled something or other under his breath in answer to her remark. Then he pressed his lips together, and it was evident that he preferred to say nothing at all.

Mama shouldn’t get so carried away, I thought. After all, the cousin had come a long way and he was exhausted. Besides, who could blame him if he felt strange with us? Mama must have felt the same way as I, because now I heard her say. “Never mind, Hans, I can see you’re very tired. I promise I won’t ask you no more questions for a few days. But I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. Right after supper I’m going to get you settled and give you a chance to rest and get used to your new relatives.”

So thinking, she eyed the two large leather suitcases and the square typewriter case on the floor beside him. And first taking a deep breath, she broached the subject now uppermost on her mind. “Hans, I’ll tell you,” she began, “I have this friend who lives just a little way down the street. This lady is a widow and she runs a boarding house and rents out rooms for a living. Anyway, what I want to tell you is that my friend has an extra room. It’s a nice room, you understand, nice and clean and it has a big desk in it where you could put your typewriter and write things on. And if you don’t mind, you could maybe stay there and eat here, because we ourselves... we have only the two bedrooms on the second floor.

My husband and I, we occupy the large one and Sophie sleeps in the little one over the kitchen.”

As mama spoke, Hans listened solemnly. “Please forgive me. Tante Rachel,” he replied. “You have no accommodation for me, and I have embarrassed you. I will be glad to occupy the room in your friend’s house, but I would like to ask if the room is quiet. For my work, you understand, it is most important that I have a quiet place.”

“Oh, absolutely quiet!” mama assured him. “There’s nobody there to making a noise. No children. Only my friend’s Persian cats that won first prize in the cat show at the Exhibition last year. And she keeps them downstairs with her all the time!”

“Then I am sure the room will be satisfactory, Tante Rachel,” said Hans, as an amused little smile touched his thin lips.

“I must tell you, though,” mama added honestly, “it’s a nice room, and quiet too, but it’s a little bit dark in there. It’s not a sunny room.”

“That is quite all right.” And Hans repeated softly, “I’m sure the room will be satisfactory.”

“Oh, thanks a lot!” mama replied with a grateful smile. “I can see you’re a very good boy. And believe me, Hans, you wouldn’t be sorry, because you’re really going to liking my friend. She’s a very fine person and a kind soul if I ever met one in my life. And you don’t need to worry nothing about the money neither! Because Mrs. Badgeley and I will straighten it out between us—”

“But I expect to pay,” declared Hans. “I have brought money, and I expect to pay.”

“You don’t have to! After all, you’re our guest,” said mama. “Besides Mrs. Badgeley is doing this as a favour to me. She and I are old friends, and we often help each other out. Believe me, over the years... there have been times... rough spots...”

In his gentle cultured voice, Hans interrupted. “I am not an ordinary guest, Tante Rachel,” he said. “As I explained to you, I have come to Canada for an indefinite time. There is much work I

have to do, and once I will be settled in my room with my books and typewriter, you will find that my time will be largely occupied.”

“But you will be coming to our house for meals?”

Hans shook his head. “No. If your friend has a boarding house, I would prefer to have my meals there.”

“You do realize, don’t you Hans, that Mrs. Badgeley is a Christian lady, and she does not run a kosher kitchen.”

“That is not important to me.”

“But are you sure you could afford to paying for everything?”

“I am sure.”

“Well, all right then,” said mama rather reluctantly. “You could do what you want. But not on *Shabbos*! You must absolutely come to us for supper every Shabbos. Because for Shabbos I wouldn’t take no for an answer!”

Well, it’s arranged,” said mama, as she removed her scarf from her head. Then slipping out of the limp black coat that she had worn for years, she shook the snowflakes from it before hanging it on the peg on the back of the door. “It’s arranged, Elia. He’s going to staying by Mrs. Badgeley and he’ll eat there too. And believe me, what I would do without Mrs. Badgeley I don’t know. She met us at the door, and she gave him soap and some clean towels. She made the room all ready and he’s taking a hot bath now.”

Papa, seated at the table in his shirtsleeves, was rolling himself another supply of cigarettes. Before him stood an opened package of bulk tobacco and a booklet of cigarette papers. Although he had closed the store some two hours before, papa was still wearing his apron over his dark trousers and open-necked shirt and vest, but he had removed his blue cardigan and it hung now from the back of his chair. At the opposite end of the table, I was doing my homework.

“Do you mean he’s not going to eat by us?” said papa, taking a moment from his occupation. Papa appeared pleased.

“Just on Shabbos,” replied mama “because for Shabbos I told him I wouldn’t take no for an answer. But the rest of the week he’ll eat by Mrs. Badgeley.”

“It don’t bother him that she is not kosher?”

“He said he don’t care.”

“And he has money to pay?” Papa was incredulous.

“It looks like he’s not short of money.”

A slow smile moved papa’s lips, revealing his strong white teeth. “Rachel! For one of your relatives this is very unusual.”

“You could laugh if you want, Elia,” replied mama soberly, “but it so happens that you hit the nail on the head, because this is actually a very unusual boy. He’s a real fine gentleman and very educated and everything. And he’s very serious and he don’t talk much neither. But I happen to knowing that he’s a very unusual boy. An unusual boy and by his father like the eyes in his head.”

“And what’s so unusual?” said papa in a conversational tone of voice. “Is not every child dear to a parent? Are my children not dear to me?”

“Naturally,” mama agreed. “But this boy is a one and only. I remember last year when Esther got the letter from Harry, she read it to me over the phone. And you know me, Elia, you know me. I couldn’t tell you what I ate today, but I could still remembering every word from that letter.”

“So let’s hear,” said papa with interest. “If you remember every word, what did the letter say?”

“It was Hans, Hans, everything Hans!” replied mama. “It was right after he graduated from the university, and they were very proud of him. He graduated for a Doctor Phil., whatever that means. It looked to me like all his life they gave into him everything he wanted, and they were very proud of him, but they were also getting worried because he was grown up already and finished with school. And it was time for him to thinking about making

a living. And you know, Elia, I told you before, my cousin Harry has this big stylish cloak factory in Berlin, so naturally he expected his son to learning the business. After all, if not him, who would looking after it? And to who, in a hundred years around, would it go? Anyway, to making a long story short, every time Hans would come down to the factory to work, he would break out in these big red bumps and he would itch all over.”

“Why did this happen?” replied papa, with distaste. “What was the matter with him that he would itch all over?”

Mama held up her hand. “Well, just a minute,” she said. “I’m just coming to that part. They had to take him to a doctor to find out why. One doctor? From one doctor they took him to another doctor, and then to another doctor after that. Finally they took him to a big specialist. And Elia, do you want me to telling you what the big specialist told them?”

“Sure!” exclaimed papa. “Why not?”

“Well, listen good, so you’ll hear it right.”

“Okay.”

“I don’t want you should say I made it up by myself.”

“All right. Shoot.”

“The big specialist said that there is nothing wrong with this patient physically, but he is a sensitive human being, an idealist and an intellectual...”

Papa stared at her

“Did you hear?”

“I heard, but what does it mean?”

“It means,” explained mama, expressively shrugging her shoulders, “that his parents had from him hot and cold! That’s what it means. And if they didn’t want he should break out in bumps and itch all over, they should keep him away from the factory, because he hated it.”

“So if he hated the factory, what did he like?” said papa, obviously perplexed.

“He liked to read.”

“To read? That’s all?”

“No,” said mama, now thoughtfully drawing out her words. “He liked to read... to playing on the violin... to going to concerts and art galleries. Things like that.”

Papa pursed his lips. “Aha!” he cried, “I get it. This kind of a fellow, if he didn’t have a father to support him, he would starve to death.”

Mama nodded. “And now,” she went on, “Harry sent him to Canada so he should write things. He said that to him the main important thing is his room should be nice and quiet and nobody should bother him and he should sit all day and write things.”

“All right, you win! He’s a very unusual boy,” said papa, holding up both hands in a gesture of defeat. Then lowering his head, he turned his attention back to cigarette making.

Mama now poked a finger into the air. “Just a minute; you’re not finished yet!” she cried. “I have something else to telling you. The boy says that Harry sent him to Canada on purpose to me, because he knows I would understand him.”

This time when papa looked up, he squinted a little. “And do you?” he said suspiciously.

“No, of course not! A sensitive human being... idealist and an intellectual... how should I understand him? I don’t understand my cousin Harry neither, and I don’t understand why he sent him here altogether!”

“All right” said papa, thoughtfully rubbing his chin for a moment, “on Shabbos when he comes, I’ll talk to him myself. I’m a man. Maybe I could make something out of him.”

Mama now moved to the table and sat down near papa. She watched as papa rolled the balance of the tobacco into a final cigarette and then carefully arranged the finished product in the empty container. “I don’t know, Elia, I don’t know what to telling you.” Her voice sounded discouraged. “A boy like that... how could you or me understand what goes on in his mind? Maybe if we could read and write, it would be different.”

“But Harry knows you couldn’t read and write!” exclaimed papa. “He knows that in Poland your father couldn’t afford to send you and in Vienna when the other children went to school, you had to go to work!”

“He must think I learned in this country,” replied mama, shamefaced. “He must think I went to night school like other people. You know, Elia, that’s what I should have done.”

“But when did you have time, Rachel, when you were all the time rushing, rushing? When did you have time even to sit down, never mind to go to school?”

“I should have found the time,” replied mama solemnly, “and so should you, Elia.”

“Ah, Rachel...” Papa spoke wearily. “You know how it was. I always thought... if we worked hard and saved the money... next year... next year. But next year never came.”

“I know,” said mama, “and nowadays people could hardly believe, if you tell them you couldn’t read and write.”

“And you look like a fool too,” added papa glumly.

Mama raised both hands in a helpless gesture. “Well, what’s the good of talking? We made a mistake, that’s all. And we’ll have to do the best we can like this already.”

“I know,” said papa, and he shrugged his shoulders in resignation, “but it would be easier... everything would be so much easier, if we could read and write.”

It was Friday afternoon, and the kitchen was warm with cooking smells. Mama had a good fire going in the stove, and from it now wafted the combined aromas of spicy chopped fish steaming in its English kettle, of chicken soup simmering in its deep enamel pot and of a duck and sweet potatoes roasting in the oven. Unwashed pots, pans and bowls filled the sink and, over at the table, with her apron spotted here and there and her dark hair

smudged with flour, mama was just putting the finishing touches on her Polish strudel.

“You’ll setting two more plates, Sophie,” mama announced briskly. “Because Auntie Esther and Uncle Morris are also coming for supper tonight.”

I clutched my forehead in mock alarm. “What? Auntie Esther is going out?”

“Yes, yes,” said mama, smiling. “Auntie Esther is going out. I called her first thing in the morning, so she had all day to getting herself ready. She and Uncle Morris are coming here to meet the cousin from Germany.”

“Well, I’ll believe it when I see it,” I said, as I began to set the table. Everything I needed was contained in our kitchen cabinet. Out of the bulging bottom drawer reserved for our linen, so-called, I took a white tablecloth. From the shallow cutlery drawer I gathered knives, forks and spoons. Then working upwards I removed platters, plates, cups and saucers, a pair of candlesticks, Shabbos candles, matches, a large cut-glass decanter and finally a half-dozen glass tumblers. I firmly grasped the neck of the decanter and descended the five steps between the kitchen and the store, through the storeroom and down a steep flight of stairs to the cellar. Here, making use of an aluminum funnel, I filled the decanter with thick grape wine from a wooden barrel.

“I made an extra special good supper tonight,” remarked mama when I returned and continued with my chore. I unfolded the cloth and smoothed it over the table. Then I carefully arranged the challah on a plate and covered it with a clean tea towel, as mama had taught me to do. With another tea towel I polished the old brass candlesticks until they shone, inserted a candle in each, and put them at mama’s place, together with the box of matches. “After all, for such a wonderful guest, why not?” mama went on, as I arranged the tumblers around the decanter. “And another thing. My sister and her husband come here once in a blue moon,

I wouldn’t want them to saying they were disappointed by my cooking.”

From long experience I knew how fascinating Auntie Esther’s reasons for not going out could be. “I just hope you won’t be disappointed yourself, mama,” I said, “because I bet you a doughnut they don’t show up.”

“All right,” mama replied confidently, “you got a bet!”

To be sure, the stakes were not high, but I won the doughnut. For shortly before seven o’clock, a profusely apologetic Auntie Esther telephoned to say that... unfortunately... it looked like... she and Uncle Morris wouldn’t be able to make it after all.

“Why not? What are you afraid of?” There was a sharp edge to mama’s voice, for often her sister’s reluctance to go out exasperated her. “It isn’t snowing, is it? And it’s not raining neither! It’s a nice clear day! Why couldn’t you come?”

At great length then Esther began to explain. The trouble was, she said, thoroughly penitent, that Morris was not feeling well. As a matter of fact, lately Morris had not been feeling well at all. Although when she had spoken to mama that morning it had slipped her mind, poor Morris had not slept all night. It was his back acting up again and he was really suffering. He could hardly walk. Come to think of it, Morris was in very bad shape...

To mama’s suggestion that she leave Uncle Morris at home and come herself, Auntie Esther had her response ready, almost on the tip of her tongue. She herself had had a bad day. To tell the truth, she had had a very bad week. Her neck was bothering her something terrible. Her neck was so sore that she didn’t know what she was going to do with it. And also her head...

“But I made a duck!” snapped mama indignantly, cutting short Auntie Esther’s list of personal ailments. “And chicken soup with kreplach, and fish—beautiful chopped fish!”

Even mama’s menu was not enough to lure the disinclined Esther from her house. “No,” she said in a voice full of remorse, “no, no.” Morris was in bad shape and she too was in bad shape.

Their conditions appeared to be worsening by the minute. Besides, it was a long, long way to Sumach Street and although no words could express her regret, neither she nor her husband were up to making the trip.

“If the cousin could come all the way from Germany,” replied mama sternly, “you should be able to making it from Borden Street!” But try as she would, mama could neither shame nor cajole Auntie Esther into making an appearance, and eventually she realized that she was playing a losing game. “All right, Esther,” she said, finally accepting her sister’s refusal, “don’t come! I’ll manage without you. Sure I’m disappointed! What do you think, I’m not disappointed? Sure, I know how to treating a guest! Do you think I’m waiting for you to show me? If I waited for you, my sister, I would still be waiting for the boat! What? You’re anxious to meeting him? And Sophie and I should bring him? On Sunday? All right, Esther, just to showing you what good sports Sophie and I are, we’ll do it! We’ll come to you on Sunday for lunch and we’ll bring the cousin too.” Then with a weary sigh of resignation, she added, “How else will the chicken crossing the street?”

By the time Hans arrived, it was a quarter past seven. The store was closed; the kitchen, warm and inviting, was in order; and we had all freshened up. Mama was tending the sizzling duck in the oven. Her hair was smooth and securely fastened into a thick bun at the back of her head, and her cheeks were flushed from the heat of the stove. Mama’s plump shoulders and shapely bosom amply rounded out the square neck of her flowered housedress over which she wore a fresh white apron. I was still wearing my school uniform, but I had scrubbed my face with soap and water until it shone. And papa had taken a shave and changed into a clean shirt.

Papa was in a good mood. Since he had little to fear from this guest who would be eating at our table only once a week, no doubt papa felt that he could afford to be expansive tonight. Cordially extending his hand, papa displayed a genuine enthusiasm for the visitor. “Come right in, Hans, and make yourself at home, why

don’t you? Here, Sophie will hang up your coat, and you take a seat while I get a glass of wine. Here we are... *l’chaim*... no hurry... take your time... This is the end of the week, time for everybody to relax over a good dinner.”

Then mama came forward. Her eyes were bright with excitement and there was an affectionate smile on her lips as she approached Hans where he sat on the chesterfield, sipping at the purple wine. From her apron pocket mama withdrew an almost black photograph, dog-eared and covered overall with fine cracks like the veins on a leaf. First gazing at it fondly, she next placed it into Hans’s hand. “I couldn’t sleep a wink until I found it,” she said, pointing to one of two shawled figures in grey against the dark background. “See, that’s your grandmother there! The Meema Channa. That’s who you look like.” Then shifting her fingers to the second figure in the photograph, mama went on in a strangely wistful voice. “And that old lady beside her was her auntie, the Meema Sasha. That’s who Sophie is named after, you know.” The day I left Vienna, Meema Sasha came to your grandmother’s house to telling me goodbye. And do you know, Hans, she took both my hands in hers and she said to me, ‘Rachel, I have no children of my own, but I want to be remembered. Some clay you will be married and you will have a daughter. Give a name after me...’.” Mama looked carefully into Hans’ face. “Well, you know how it was. I came to this country and I was all the time busy, busy, and I forgot all about her. But would you believe it, a few days before Sophie was born, that old lady came to me in a dream. She looked so real... just like she was that day! And when I woke up in the morning, I said to my husband, ‘Elia, we are going to having another daughter, and we will call her after my Meema Sasha’.”

Under mama’s steady gaze, Hans nodded and he smiled a little self-consciously.

When we were seated around the table, papa occupied the chair farthest from the stove. I sat to papa’s right and Hans sat opposite me. Mama, whose place was nearest the stove, proceeded

to light the candles. “Actually, we are not strictly orthodox,” she remarked, as striking a match she carefully lifted the tiny flame to the wick, “but two things we always try to do—to keeping a kosher kitchen and to kindling the Sabbath lights.” Then with both hands poised above the glittering candles, she began:

“*Boruch atto Adonoi Elohenu melech ho-olom asher kid’shonu b’mittvossof v’tzivonu I’hadlik ner shel shabbos.*” (Blessed art thou, Lord our God, king of the universe, who has sanctified us and commanded us to kindle the Sabbath lights.)

And smiling brightly, she added, “Good Shabbos! Good Shabbos, everyone!”

During the few moments when mama was delivering the blessing, I glanced at Hans from under lowered eyelids. I noted then that his face was very sad, and that two large tears had formed in his eyes and were running down his freckled cheeks. Hans inconspicuously removed his handkerchief from his vest pocket and wiped the tears away.

We began the meal with chopped fish and next we had chicken soup served in large deep bowls. “I hope you like kreplach, Hans,” said mama between spoonfuls. It was perhaps a tall order for her to serve, partake of the meal herself and to carry on a rather one-sided conversation, but mama managed to do it. And when she carried to the table the large platter on which, breast side up, lay the steamy fragrant duck surrounded by savory sweet potatoes, she commented, “I suppose you’ve noticed that there’s enough food here to feeding an army. My sister Esther and her husband were supposed to come, but they couldn’t make it because they’re in bad shape.” And looking at Hans sincerely, she added, “But my sister feels bad, Hans, and she wants I should bring you there Sunday with Sophie for lunch.”

As Hans assented with a silent nod, mama smiled. “Oh, thanks a lot! My sister, she can hardly wait to meeting you. Now come on, Hans! Let’s see you eat. What kind of a guest are you anyway? You didn’t eat nothing yet.”

Still reflecting upon the two large tears that had rolled down Hans’s face, I risked a wary glance in his direction. I was aware that he ate sparingly, uneasily shifting the food about on his plate, and that in answer to mama’s animated remarks, he replied only when necessary and in a strained voice.

Papa ate with obvious relish. For the duration of the meal at least, papa was confining his conversation to suitable comments about the food. “Pass the wine, Sophie, please,” he said and refilled the glasses all round.

“How would you like to hand me that plate of red peppers, Hans? Try them yourself, why don’t you? They’re delicious with meat.”

“From who did you get such a delicious duck, Rachel? Not from our thief of a poultry farmer, for sure!”

And mama, bustling between stove and table, chattered away amiably. She reminisced through the years she had lived in her aunt’s house in Vienna. “Your father was a big mischief in those days,” she said with a chuckle. “Do you know what he did to me once? I was just telling Sophie the other day. It was on my sixteenth birthday, and he dumped me right in the river! He did it for a joke and I came home soaking wet. I remember Meema Channa scolded him because she was afraid I would get sick.”

“And did you, Tante Rachel? Did you get sick?” Hans wanted to know.

“No,” mama replied. “I never ever got sick. But we had lots of fun. Do you know, Hans, Meema Channa always used to saying that she didn’t know about the other two boys but your father had a wonderful head for business; your father— everybody was crazy about him, your father... .”

Hans could endure it no longer. All at once his face twisted and he burst into tears. And sobbing, he buried his face in his hands. I raised both my hands to my cheeks. And mama and papa simply stared at each other.

It was I who made the first move. “Hans,” I began hesitantly, “my parents and I... we would like to help you, but I don’t think we know how.”

“That’s right,” papa added quickly, “We’re plain people here, son, but if you would maybe give us a chance... .”

“Yes, Hans,” said mama softly, and rising, she instinctively placed a hand on his thick hair. “If you would only tell us what the trouble is, maybe we could help you something.”

As mama gently stroked his hair and papa and I watched solemnly, Hans began to recover his self-control. Then he lifted his head and wiped at his eyes with his handkerchief. His face was pale and beneath his red-rimmed eyes the white skin looked soft and vulnerable. “You people cannot help me,” he sighed. “Nobody can.” He turned to me. “I also had a home and parents, Sophie. A beautiful mother who kindled the Sabbath lights and a fine father who went to work and returned to us at night. We too were a happy family.”

“Oh, my dear child!” mama protested. “What are you talking about?”

“I speak of my parents,” replied Hans, “of my parents whom I may never see again. You see, six weeks ago my father suffered a heart attack...”

“Heart attack...” As the blood drained from mama’s face, she pressed her hand to her own heart. “But if your father is sick, what are you doing here?”

Hans turned his face full upon mama. “My father sent me away, Tante Rachel. He could barely speak, but somehow he found the strength to make his wish clear. ‘Go, go! Go while I am still alive!’ he begged me. ‘Go now so I will know before I die that you got out! Go to the bank and see how much money they will let you take out of Germany. Herr Krueger will arrange it. Then book passage on the first boat you can get. And go! Go to my cousin Rachel in Toronto, Canada. Rachel will understand you and she will know what to do for you’.”

“But what about your mother?” cried mama.

“My mother would never leave him. The best I can hope for her is that she does not long survive my father. And that both of them may have the privilege of dying in their own beds. A privilege, I am afraid, that will soon be denied Jews in my country.”

By now all reticence had dropped from Hans. “The other day you asked me, Tante Rachel, if a Jew may hold public office in Germany.” His lips twisted with a cynical sneer. “Well, I assure you that he may not! The racial laws forbid it. A Jew cannot work for a newspaper any more, or teach in a German school. Or even play in a symphony orchestra. Our schools are now breeding grounds for anti-Semitism, and it has become most difficult for a Jew to earn a living any-where. You see, under the Nazis Jewish life has become very cheap!”

As we watched wretchedly, his eyes grew feverish. “All my life my parents pamper me and they encourage me in a life of my own choosing, a life of the intellect. If they were able, my parents would yet have me preserve my ideals. Even now, they would have me believe that our beloved Germany is not polluted and our lofty culture not every day degraded and prostituted! Oh yes, if it were in their power, my parents would spare me from all wickedness and harsh reality; from the knowledge that people are brutal and corrupt and full of hate and that the world is full of evil!”

Shifting his body in his chair, Hans leaned forward now and pinned mama with an intense gaze. And in a shrill voice he informed her: “My father suffered his heart attack while he was in a concentration camp. They came in the middle of the night with their jackboots and their black shirts, and they pounded on the door with their fists. “*Aufmachen*’ they shouted. ‘Get up! Get ready! You have two minutes!’ My father had barely enough time to pull on his trousers, but I threw his overcoat over his nightshirt and they took him away, with my mother fainting at their feet!”

They took him to Oranienburg, the concentration camp and while he was there...”

“What’s a concentration camp?” I asked.

Hans replied with wonder in his voice. “You never heard of a concentration camp, Sophie? But there are so many of them in Germany! Since Adolf Hitler became chancellor, these camps have been established where real and so-called enemies of the government are taken. Here they are held surrounded by barbed wire and given a good beating, often for no better reason than to intimidate them. My father was an innocent man! One day while he was at his factory, he happened to make a little joke about Hitler. One of his employees overheard it and told the Gestapo. This was the reason for his arrest. And while he was at the concentration camp, one of the guards made a mistake. Oh, perhaps the wretch meant only to frighten my father. Who knows? But in his frenzy he got carried away, you see, and he beat him and beat him...”

Just then I was startled by a sound that I had never heard before. It was mama groaning. “*Oy gevalt.*” Then I saw her cover her face with her hands, as papa in his haste knocking over his wine glass, jumped from his chair and seizing her by the shoulders, clasped her to him, “Oh, my poor cousin! They beat him till he got a heart attack!” The shrillness of mama’s voice was muffled against papa’s breast.

To me the evening’s turn of events appeared quite beyond belief. I felt as if I were trapped in an eerie nightmare. Hans’s outburst and the sight of my parents clinging so awkwardly to each other had quite unnerved me. Papa’s face was grey and grim, and a large blue vein that I had never noticed before was pulsing at the side of his neck. And mama, so pale, was weeping on papa’s vest. And suddenly both of them looked old! Never in my life had I experienced a sense of panic such as now gripped the pit of my stomach.

“Papa...” I whimpered, “papa, I’m afraid!”

“No, don’t you be afraid, Sophie.” Papa’s voice reached my ears soothing and more gentle than I ever remembered it. “Mama will be all right.”

“And Hans, papa? What about Hans?”

“Hans will be all right too. In a little while I’m going to walk with him back to Mrs. Badgeley’s house, and I’ll sit with him in his room until he feels better.”

“But, papa... Hans’s father... they came in the middle of the night!”

“You don’t need to worry.” Papa spoke with an assurance he perhaps did not feel. “That’s not going to happen to me.”

“Are you sure, papa?”

“I’m sure.”

“Papa, I don’t know what to do.”

“Do?” said papa vaguely. “Do the dishes, why don’t you? That’s a good thing to do.”

As I gathered the dishes together, mama gradually steadied herself. Then producing a handkerchief from her apron pocket, she wiped her cheeks and blew her nose. “I’m all right now, Elia,” she said in a fairly even voice. “But do me a favour and get me a drink of schnapps.”

“You’re a good girl, Rachel,” said papa with obvious relief, as he released her. And hurrying to the china cabinet, he opened one of its numerous doors. From behind a row of canisters at the very back of the remotest shelf, he took out the bottle of Scotch whisky reserved for emergencies. He uncapped it and removing glasses, he poured three drinks. The first be handed to mama; the second he downed himself in a single gulp; and the third he gave to Hans. “Drink this down, son, it will do you good,” said papa, placing a reassuring hand on Hans’s shoulder.

Mama sipped the whisky until there was none left in the glass and, fortified, she braced her shoulders. Then like a ranking officer, she took charge of the situation. As the truth had, with sickening swiftness, unfolded before our eyes, mama had been

jolted and lifted beyond her dozen blocks. I heard her sigh, and I knew that she now understood. She understood everything. Her cousin Harry had said that she would understand, and he was right. She did. Mama understood Hans, she understood Harry; and she understood why her cousin had sent his gentle, lonely, bitter son to her.

It was because he was destitute. How wrong of her to think that Harry could be mistaken in assuming that she would understand his son! She should have trusted her cousin more. And how foolish of her to think that because she could not read and write, she was not qualified to understand this young man! What business did she have trying to understand his mind, when all Harry meant was that she would understand his heart! She who had been destitute, would certainly understand the heart of this boy, her cousin's son, who by the twists and turns of fate was now destitute on her doorstep. Why, of course she would! Does one orphan not understand the heart of another?

Her cousin had said that she would know what to do for his son. And she did. Mama knew what to do, all right! She had only to do what her Meema Channa, Harry's mother, had done. To take to her heart his destitute child, just as his mother had taken to hers her brother's orphans. To take him to her heart and to convince him somehow that one hand does indeed wash the other, and that he did not have to bear his grief alone, to sweeten as best she could his bitterness, and to encourage him in his work, as his father would have encouraged him, had he but had the opportunity.

Mama moved to the table where Hans sat now rubbing his forehead. Very gently she placed her fingertips under his chin and raised his face until he could not avoid looking into her eyes. "Hans," she began, "what can I tell you? You are right. But you must not forget, my dear child, that there is also goodness in the world and love and so many wonderful kind people. Ever since the world began, it has been the same. But the world, it looks like, must go

on. And you, Hans, you must go on too! You must keep your head up and go on and always believe that life is full of possibilities."

Her eyes glistened as mama went on. "The other day you told me that you want to be a writer. And this is what I have to telling you. You will be a writer, Hans. You'll see! And you'll write good too! And people will read what you write. Yes, they will! And in everything you write, you will tell the truth!"

Mama dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief. "Your poor father, he knew what he was doing when he sent you to me. He said that I would understand you, and I do. I understand you, Hans, and I know what to do. I will do for you everything I can. I will stand behind you and give you courage, until you find your way. Your grandmother did it for me and I will do it for you."

She nodded towards papa and me. "Elia is a father, and he could helping you in lots of ways. And Sophie... Sophie will do what she can. Don't be strange with us, Hans! Let us help you!"

They were both crying now, but in spite of the tears, they managed to exchange a long, deep look. It was a look that was forever to cement their relationship. "We're going to understanding each other, you and I," said mama, as a sad little smile touched her thin lips. And now with a single gesture cradling his head, mama drew him to her and pressed the palm of her hand against his damp cheek, as with a shrill sob, Hans sank his face against the warmth of her breast.

When papa came in from outside, he quietly closed the kitchen door behind him. As he removed his coat and cap and hung them up, his face bore a profound look of weariness.

"Maybe you'll drink a cup of coffee with Sophie and me? Maybe you'll do us the honour?" said mama, setting the pot on the stove to boil, as I washed the last of the dishes.

“All right. I’ll do you the honour,” replied papa, sitting down and clasping his hands over one knee. “Noo, Rachel, if tzores is going to come, it will find you wherever you are. Tonight it came and found us right in our kitchen, eating supper.”

As she set cups and saucers, mama shook her head sadly. “There’s plenty tzores,” she sighed. “There’s a fire burning there in Germany, and who knows what will be here yet.” Then glancing at papa out of the corner of her eye, she asked, “How was the boy when you left him?”

“How was the boy,” said papa. “He was sitting quiet. He didn’t holler no more.”

“He hollered enough. He is all hollered out.”

“Yes, he hollered out his tonight.”

“That was a good thing you did, Elia, you went and sat with him in his room.”

Papa shrugged his shoulders. “He’s a young boy, Rachel. Younger even than our Annie, and not so much older than Sophie. “As I put the dishes away in the china cabinet, I could feel papa’s eyes staring at me. “One thing about it, Rachel,” he said after a while, “tonight you wouldn’t have to tell me to feel grateful. Because tonight I remember who I am. A man like me, Rachel, tonight I could feel grateful all by myself.”

A Party for a Grandchild

During the weeks since the birth of her son, my sister often wrote happy, newsy letters, and with them she enclosed snapshots of the baby. I must say that to me, my nephew appeared pretty ordinary. But not to mama and papa. To them he was a most unusual child, perfect in every detail. Gordon was a month old now, and Annie planned to have the Pidyan Haben ceremony for him on Sunday.

In an effort to synchronize our celebration with the one in my sister’s home, mama had made her arrangements during the past week. She had cooked, baked and reminded our guests of the event a day or two ahead. Now the big day had arrived, and in the inviting warmth of our kitchen a party honouring the Pidyan Haben of the Siegel grandchild was underway.

I had set the table with a white cloth. Beside the platters of Jewish food and Viennese pastry, I had stacked dishes and gathered cutlery to one side. I had also filled the cut-glass decanter with wine from the barrel in the cellar. The decanter stood now in the centre of the table, surrounded by drinking glasses.

Most of the guests were already there. Freddie the milkman, George Williams the baker, Mr. McGillivray the condiment salesman, Mr. and Mrs. Yukel Baldovich (who, for reasons of their own, had brought Arala along), Hazel Wiggins, Maude Maloney and Mr. and Mrs. Frank Gady. They were already there and seated around the room, chatting comfortably.

The Misses Victoria and Alicia Newhall had been invited but had declined, giving as their reason that it would be too late a night out for them. But Hans Stern was present. He was sitting quietly in the background, with his arms folded across his chest and his

head inclined thoughtfully to one side. I was happy to see that two or three of the others nodded to Hans and that, smiling slightly, he nodded in return.

Hazel Wiggins had pinned a pink fabric flower to the shoulder of her new second-hand dress from the Salvation Army, and at her side Maude Maloney sat, dressed completely in black. Evidently Maude had gone all out for this occasion. She was wearing the dress she had bought especially for the recent funeral of her great-aunt Belinda. As a matter of fact Maude, apprehensive lest she be caught unprepared for that important event, had purchased the black dress as soon as the old woman's illness had given signs of becoming fatal, a full three weeks prior to her demise.

Maude had as yet had nothing to drink. "Oh, no, no! Thank you just the same, Mr. Siegel, but I wouldn't think of it!" she exclaimed, as papa stopped before her with a tray containing glasses of wine.

"Oh, come on now, don't be like that, Mrs. Maloney!" papa urged, with rare agreeableness. "You must try it! It's our own recipe."

"Well, all right then, if it's your own recipe," allowed Maude. "But just a drop, mind you! Just enough to wet my whistle." Then she leaned forward and looking the tray over carefully, she helped herself to a well-filled glass and in a single gulp drank it down and smacked her lips with gusto.

A knock was now heard at the side door and, answering it, I received the additional guests. They were Harriet Harris and her two sons, Wesley and Roland, mild-mannered men in their middle thirties. In her new grey pinstripe suit, deep felt hat and Stone Marten furs, Harriet was conspicuously well dressed in comparison with the other women in the room. As she entered, Harriet gave the others a rather cold sweeping look, and the animated chattering in the room subsided. It might have been an awkward moment, had mama and papa not come to the rescue. "Come right in, why don't you?" said papa, cordially shaking hands. And mama cried,

"Oh, it's so good to seeing you all! Sophie! Sophie, take the coats upstairs for Mrs. Harris!"

As I gathered coats, hats and scarves, mama ushered the trio into the room. "Please sit down and make yourselves comfortable," she said, and looking back over her shoulder, she called: "Elia, Elia, bring some wine. And don't forget the sponge cake!"

Papa was hurrying as fast as he could. He placed glasses on a tray and filled them with wine. Then adding a plate of cake, he carried the tray to the Harris party. In the meantime, Harriet found a vacant spot on the chesterfield beside Mr. McGillivray, while her sons took chairs near the Baldoviches. Oddly enough, Yukel was staring straight ahead, as if there was something wrong with his neck. But then, I noted that he refused nothing—that he ate and drank rather sturdily, in fact.

When papa first offered wine to Wesley and Roland Harris, they politely declined. "Oh, come on, take a chance!" said papa. "You'll be surprised how good it tastes!"

The brothers looked at each other dubiously; then taking a glass each, they tentatively tasted the wine. Their eyes widened and they did appear agreeably surprised. "Here, try some sponge cake with it," said papa. "It helps it go down better." Once they got the hang of it, Wesley and Roland required no additional urging for the balance of the evening.

When he could escape the watchful eye of his mother, the uninvited guest, Arala Baldovich, approached the table and stuck a furtive forefinger into all the food—into the kishka, the knishes, the chopped liver and into the sponge cake, which sprang back at his touch.

"What can I get for you, Arala?" I asked, coming up from behind him.

Arala glanced at me shrewdly in order to assess whether or not I had noticed his surreptitious activities. Then perhaps deciding that I had not, he pointed to everything in turn. I arranged a plate for him, making sure to include several pieces of the cake. "Now

you go over there and sit down beside your mother, like a good boy. And eat!”

But Arala was not entirely satisfied. Holding the plate of food firmly in one hand, he looked up at me and wordlessly pointed to the decanter of wine.

“Oh no, you don’t! That’s much too powerful for a little boy like you!”

Over at the chesterfield, Mr. McGillivray stood up quite unexpectedly and lifting his wine glass, he announced, “I wish at this time to propose a toast. To the new grandchild— may he always be a good boy and a source of pride and happiness to his parents.” Perhaps a little overwhelmed by his own eloquence, Mr. McGillivray sat down immediately.

“And to his grandparents!” added young Freddie, with a smile.

“Here, here!” cried George Williams.

“To the grandchild!” Wesley Harris exclaimed, clinking glasses with his brother.

“To the grandchild!” called out Mrs. Baldovich. “Might he should always bring *naches* to everybody!” Then in a grand gesture, she swung her glass around and collided it with her husband’s. Yukel, however, remained stonily silent. No doubt he had no intention of being caught off his guard, and on the spur of the moment entering into a relationship which he would most certainly regret later.

“To the grandchild!” declared Maude Maloney, holding her glass aloft. “May he grow up to own a chain of groceterias!”

“My goodness,” added Hazel Wiggins, “to the grandchild.”

“You bet!” said Frank Gady “To the grandchild!”

“Yes, of course, to the grandchild!” Bertha Gady added her toast.

“To the grandchild! To the grandchild!” echoed everyone in unison. Only Hans Stern remained silent, sitting solemnly with a glass of wine in his hand.

As the attention of their guests centred around them, mama and papa stood side by side in the midst of it all. It was an unprecedented moment of happiness for them, and their faces beamed with pleasure.

“Thank you, everyone, very much for your good wishes,” said papa proudly, as he and mama joined in the toast.

“Yes, yes,” said mama, flushing with excitement. “Thank you all for coming tonight for our *simchah*. Now come on, let’s eat and drink and everybody having a good time!”

The atmosphere was one of true conviviality. Hearing the bright voices, the occasional effusive burst of laughter, seeing the plates and glasses go out full and come back emptied, I knew that the celebration was going well. And it gratified me to see what a source of joy the evening was to mama. Only one thing was wrong. Christina Badgeley was not present among the guests.

At one point in the festivities, Maude Maloney turned to Hazel Wiggins and was heard to say, “Did you hear about Mrs. Badgeley, Hazel?”

“No, Maude, what?”

“She sent a message that she couldn’t come.”

“What’s that?” asked Harriet Harris. “Why couldn’t Mrs. Badgeley come tonight?”

Maude cast an astonished look in Harriet’s direction. For all of a sudden a sense of importance had been thrust upon her. In front of all these people, Harriet Harris had deigned to address her! “Oh yes,” Maude replied airily, “Mrs. Badgeley sent the message in before with Jimmie Nash. I’m sure you all know Jimmie. He’s the little boy who lives next door to Mrs. Badgeley. Jimmy wouldn’t be more than nine or ten years old, and I think he’s in the fourth grade down at Park School.”

“Yes, yes, but never mind all that,” replied Harriet. “Why couldn’t Mrs. Badgeley come?”

“Because,” stated Maude, obviously savouring each word, “she said that Mr. Suede looked very low to her, and she didn’t think she should leave him tonight.”

“Oh, is that so?”

“I was wondering why Mrs. Badgeley wasn’t here,” Bertha Gady remarked to Mrs. Baldovich.

Mrs. Baldovich nodded her head sadly. “A pity on him,” she observed. “A sick man.”

Yukel Baldovich also nodded his head sympathetically, but uttered not a word. Everyone in the room had by now overheard the disquieting news about Mrs. Badgeley’s boarder, and each person adopted a serious demeanor.

Maude looked around and, once more picking up the ball of the conversation, she carried it a little farther. Evidently, she still had a gem or two in her possession. “Yes,” she added, “Mrs. Badgeley is very attached to Mr. Suede and she’s been nursing him for years. Ever since he first moved into her home.”

“Poor man,” said Harriet. “Poor man...”

Although I was kept busy washing the dishes and keeping the decanter full of wine, I still had time to notice that papa was becoming carried away by the excitement of the occasion, that in the process of serving the guests, papa was taking ample advantage of the refreshments himself. In fact, papa was downing a glass of wine with each trip to and from the table.”

Then for one rather alarming moment, there was a slight distraction. This was when Arala screamed.

“What’s the matter, Arala?” I asked, anxiously rushing over to him.

“My cake’s gone!”

“You ate it up, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“So why are you screaming?”

“Because it was good.”

“Come on,” I said, leading him to the table. “I’ll get you some more, but don’t you dare scream again!”

Harriet Harris looked about haughtily. Quite clearly she was conscious of her own superior status among these people. She was conscious, also, of the unattached man sitting beside her. And she was looking him over. What she saw was a mild mannered man who took pains with his appearance. A neat man, wearing a respectable looking suit. But wait! The cuffs showing ever so slightly under the sleeves were very much frayed. A neat man, but a poor one, not worth considering after all.

Mr. McGillivray, however, was not even looking Harriet’s way. His eyes were following mama as she graciously tended her guests, making sure that no one was neglected and that everyone over-ate. He appeared charmed—captivated even, by the way mama looked in the polka-dot dress with the little piece of lace at her throat. With her dark eyes sparkling and her cheeks so flushed.

It went on for some time. Mama, papa and I ran back and forth catering to everyone, plying them with more and more food and wine. And the voices speaking all at once formed a pleasant din. Herself under the influence of two or three glasses of wine, mama was moving from one guest to another with her tray, taking rather unnatural mincing little steps. She had suddenly adopted some very genteel mannerisms—laughing lightheartedly at off-hand comments, from time to time daintily patting her hair, and flicking imaginary flecks from the lace inset in her dress. Pausing for a moment in front of Mrs. Wiggins, she urged: “Eat, eat, Mrs. Wiggins! It’s a simchah!” And as Hazel helped herself to a little of the food, mama added, “Why don’t you sneak one of the knishes on your plate too? It wouldn’t hurt you!”

“My goodness!” said Hazel. “Thank you very much.”

“So much of everything and everything so delicious!” enthused Bertha Gady, once more heaping her plate to capacity.

“Well, just a little then. Just a drop,” conceded Maude Maloney, when papa approached her with the wine.

By now papa was steering a distinctly erratic course between the table and his guests ranged about the room. There was no doubt about it. I could tell that papa was drunk. Then on one of his unsteady trips, he slumped on a chair with one entire arm resting heavily upon the table. Over-indulgence in the wine had made papa drowsy and heavy, and it had becalmed his nerves so that he was in the mood to sing. And now in a deep rich voice, he began. Papa’s eyes were glazed with tears and the expression on his face was very sad, as very slowly he intoned a verse from an old Jewish song.

“Es vilt sich mir parnoosah...

Es vilt sich mir sein reich...

Es vilt sich mir parnoosah...

Es vilt sich mir zu sein mit leiten gleich...”

Immediately a hush fell upon the room and the atmosphere became strained by the mystifying song. Only Hazel Wiggins was heard, as she gave a nervous little titter. “Look, Maude, look at his face. He’s crying!”

“Sh... sh... sh...” whispered Maude. “He’ll hear you.”

All eyes were upon papa as he tilted sideways on the table, with his head rolled loosely on his shoulder. And as I hurried from the sink to where papa slouched insensible, I heard Harriet Harris say, “Sophie, what do those words mean?”

“They just mean that my father would like to be prosperous, Mrs. Harris,” I said, placing a protective hand on papa’s shoulder.

And now mama came running over, and she shook papa by the shoulder. But we both knew, mama and I, that papa was out for the night. With a thin smile, mama addressed the men among our guests. “It looks like my husband is too fond of his own wine.

Come on, fellows, give me a hand with him, and let’s get him upstairs, so he can sleep it off.”

“Sure, Mrs. Siegel,” said Freddie.

Instantly he was on his feet. And Hans Stern and Frank Gady. They lifted papa, Freddie under his arms and Hans and Frank each taking one leg, and they carried him to the hall and up the stairs. “It’s the room to the right!” mama called after them. Then re-entering the kitchen, she clapped her hands sharply and announced to the room at large. “All right, Elia will soon be comfortable in his own bed for the night. Let the rest of us having some more fun! Sophie, take Mrs. Harris’s dish and bring some tea for Mr. McGillivray. Come on, everybody, there’s still plenty food and lots more wine...”

But the spell was broken. It was Mr. McGillivray who made the first move. “No, thank you, Mrs. Siegel,” he said. “I’ve had tea. I’ve had my fill of everything. It’s high time I was running along.” Then standing, he placed his empty cup and saucer on the table.

Yukel Baldovich also rose. Pursing his lips together as if to speak, on second thought, he didn’t say anything.

“Yes, yes, it’s getting late,” said Mrs. Baldovich. “Time for Arala to go to sleep.”

“I’m not tired yet,” offered Arala.

“Shah,” replied Mrs. Baldovich. “Sophie, please to bring our coats.”

I made several trips upstairs for coats and hats, and gradually the guests took their leave.

“It was a most enjoyable evening, one that I will always remember,” said Mr. McGillivray, shaking mama’s hand. Then he added. “I do hope that Mr. Siegel will suffer no ill effects in the morning.”

Hans Stern was next. “I am so glad that I was here this night, Tante Rachel,” he said, as he took mama’s hand.

And Freddie the milkman. “Good-night, Mrs. Siegel. It was a lovely simchah.” And proud of his Yiddish vocabulary, with his infectious smile, Freddie added the word “Mazeltoiv!”

“Thank you, Freddie.”

“It was wonderful, wonderful!” cried George Williams.

“It was good to seeing you, George.”

“I never ate so much in my life!” confided Bertha Gady.

“Neither did I,” echoed her husband Frank. “And we did enjoy it all!”

“So glad you could both make it,” replied mama.

Back in the kitchen, Hazel Wiggins was having trouble with Maude Maloney. She was, in fact, experiencing considerable difficulty in getting her to stand up. Maude was sitting bolt upright on her chair, staring straight ahead as if mesmerized. Hazel was passing a hand back and forth in front of Maude’s eyes, but she appeared not to notice. “Maude!” cried Hazel. “Maude! Oh, my goodness! Maude! Maude!”

I came to Hazel’s assistance. “You shake her by one shoulder and I’ll shake the other,” I suggested. Fortunately our joint efforts were not in vain. For after several minutes of violent shaking, during which her hair flopped about like a mop, Maude began to stir from within. Then, of her own volition, she began to move.

“Are you all right, Maude?” asked Hazel, looking solicitously into her face. To her immense relief, the light was back in Maude’s eyes. “Do you think you can stand up?”

With our assistance, Maude got unsteadily to her feet. Then, after we had helped her on with her coat and hat, weaving mightily, Maude managed to walk across the room to the door where mama was standing.

“Good night, Mrs. Maloney,” said mama. “I hope you’re all right.”

“Good night, Shiegel,” Maude replied thickly. Then looking about uncertainly, she called, “Hashel! Hashel! Hash anybody here sheen Hashel?”

“My goodness!” said Hazel, following fast upon Maude’s heels.

“Oh, there you are, Hashel!” cried Maude, as the two of them stumbled out into the night.

Mama had shaken hands with every person in turn, had favoured each with a smile and a few cordial words, and now all the guests had departed, with the exception of Mrs. Harris and her two sons. “Sophie has gone up for your coats and hats,” mama informed them. “She’ll be down in a minute.”

Under the influence of the unaccustomed wine, Wesley and Roland Harris had somewhere during the evening cast off the reserve with which they had entered. Now each pulled back his lips as far as they would go, so that all their teeth were displayed, down to and including the last back molars. In this manner they smiled foolishly to each other, and tittered soundlessly.

“Here now, you two!” Mrs. Harris admonished them. “Don’t look so stupid! Put on your coats and hats and get yourselves outside for some fresh air!” Thus rebuked by their mother, the brothers drew themselves up sharply, and hurriedly shaking mama’s hand, they sidled out the door.

Now that I had brought down the very last coat and hat, tired and yawning, I excused myself and went upstairs.

“Your new suit looks beautiful on you, Mrs. Harris,” said mama. “Wear it in good health.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Siegel.”

“Well, it looks like you’re my last guest,” mama said wearily. “I hope that you and your sons enjoyed yourselves. And I’m only sorry my husband couldn’t last out the night.”

“Don’t apologize for that,” said Harriet. “It isn’t every day a man becomes a grandfather.”

“It’s good of you to understanding like that,” said mama. “And about that suit, Mrs. Harris, I asked Elia about it and he says it’s all right with him. And now that the weather is getting a little warmer, I’m planning for to seeing the children in another week or two. So if you could bring it in with you tomorrow when you shop, I’ll have the money ready.”

“Oh!” said Harriet, and she began to busy herself with her Stone Martens. It seemed to mama that she was paying an unnecessary amount of attention to them. “I meant to tell you about that, Mrs. Siegel. I’ve changed my mind.”

For a moment mama simply stared at Harriet. When she realized that she had heard correctly, she exclaimed, “Changed your mind? Why, Mrs. Harris, what do you mean?”

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Siegel, but I’ve decided to keep it.”

“Oh, Mrs. Harris, don’t say that! You must know how much that suit means to me. I was counting on it for the trip.”

Harriet spoke kindly. “Really, Mrs. Siegel, you had no right to count on it, you know.”

“But Mrs. Harris, you gave me your word!”

Harriet did try to reason with mama. “Don’t you understand? I’ve simply changed my mind. I’ve thought it over and decided that I may still use it occasionally. Really, I see no reason to leave myself short, Mrs. Siegel. After all, it is my suit and it’s my privilege to change my mind.”

“But when Mrs. Siegel gives her word,” replied mama sternly, “she doesn’t change her mind.”

“Well, that’s your own concern,” Harriet spoke as equably as she could manage. So far as she was concerned,

I’m sure, this matter was becoming quite tedious. But then evidently striking upon an idea, Harriet went on in a rather bright tone of voice. ‘I’ll tell you what I will do, though, since you seem so upset. You remember my blue flowered dress, don’t you? I bought it only last year and I distinctly remember you saying at the time

that you liked it. I’ll let you have that, Mrs. Siegel, and what’s more, you can have it, free of charge.”

It must have been the words ‘free of charge’ that did it. For at the mention of them, mama’s anger flared and in a voice choked with tears, she burst out, “It’s all right, Mrs. Harris! You could change your mind! Sure it’s your privilege! You won’t never wear that suit again anyway, but don’t leave yourself short! And Mrs. Harris, you don’t need to giving me any dress free of charge! Because if you want to know, I could give you a dress free of charge!”

And now mama did something that she had never done in her whole life before. She was rude to a guest! For turning abruptly on her heel, she walked quickly away, leaving Mrs. Harris standing there all by herself, in the hall, without so much as a proper goodbye!

All this time I had been standing on the landing at the top of the stairs. I had been waiting to speak to mama about something, but by now I had quite forgotten what it was. Mama climbed the stairs and when she reached me, I saw the tears in her eyes.

Two Brothers

On the morning after the party, the Misses Victoria and Alicia Newhall came to call. They, it seemed, had been put in charge of the collection for a wreath for Mr. Suede, who had passed away during the night. And from door to door in the neighbourhood the elderly spinsters went to carry out their mission.

They themselves donated 25¢ between them. Mrs. Badgeley, Frank Gady, Mrs. Baldovich and Mrs. Maloney contributed 25¢ each. Hazel Wiggins felt badly about it, but she could spare nothing at all this week. Harriet Harris gave 50¢, and mama led the donations with a dollar—75¢ from the business, she explained, and 25¢ in the name of her grandchild. All in all, the sisters managed to collect \$5.25, enough for the purchase of a handsome wreath and an impressive sympathy card.

Victoria and Alicia related how early that morning a large black car had drawn up in front of Mrs. Badgeley's house and out of the chauffeur-driven limousine had stepped the great man himself. Tall, erect, conservatively dressed in a black topcoat and bowler hat, his grey hair thick and short and his look of distinction unmistakable, he mounted the steps and knocked softly on the door. "May I see him, Mrs. Badgeley?"

She led the way. The room was in semi-darkness, and a sheet had been drawn over Paul's body. Christina had carefully tidied up, had thrown out the empty whisky bottle from Paul's wastebasket and removed the half-filled one from the top of the chiffonier.

"Did he suffer much?" asked Roland Suede in a hushed voice.

"No," said Christina. Her face looked strained. "He just fell asleep at the end. You see, he was so tired, he didn't mind."

"Please leave us alone for a little while."

As Christina withdrew, Roland pulled up a chair and seated himself beside the bed. With his grey head bowed, he sat there for a long time, a ponderous figure beside the body of his brother, the strange haunted brother who had been born unequal to the rough and tumble of this world. They had both been born Suedes, and in their veins had flowed the same blood. Yet his own path from the very beginning had lain at his feet, clear and unwavering to the progress and fulfillment of a good life. A life consisting of family, love, loyalty, a fine profession and the respect of his fellow men. While his brother, a confused lamb who had strayed from the fold, had all his life been motivated by... what? His endeavours had been washed away with the tide, and he found only disillusionment, ruthlessness and a faithlessness that had consumed his gentle spirit.

What was Roland Suede thinking then? Was he blaming himself? Had he found time for his brother all through the years? Had he held the door open for him? Had he really tried? Why had he allowed him to walk alone in the world, to wander, an outcast among strangers? Should not he, of all people, have found the way for him? Was anyone better qualified to help his brother than he, a judge in the Supreme Court of Canada?

Before Roland left the house, Mrs. Badgeley spoke a few tactful words with him. "May I ask what arrangements you wish made, your honour?"

"My brother will be laid to rest in the family plot," said Roland Suede. "A hearse will come for him at two o'clock this afternoon." He handed her a card, and added, "If you wish to attend the service on Wednesday, this is the address."

"I'll be there," said Christina. "And the neighbours, you know, they want to send a wreath."

"That's very good of them. Please thank them for me."

"I will," Christina assured him. "And what do you wish done with his things?"

“I was going to ask you, Mrs. Badgeley, if you would dispose of them yourself.”

“I could give his clothes and books to the church.”

“All right;”

“And what about his radio? Will you send for it?”

“No, I think my brother would have liked you to have that.” Christina’s eyes opened wide. “Oh, thank you very much! That is most generous of you.”

Roland’s next words were spoken so low that Christina had to strain her ears to hear them. “Mrs. Badgeley, I realize that I owe you a debt of gratitude that I can never hope to repay.”

“Your brother meant a lot to me,” Christina answered. “I want you to know, your honour, that he was a rare gentleman.” And Roland nodded, for he knew that Christina spoke the truth.

The sky was dark and a damp snow was falling when the hearse drew up in front of 128 Oak Street that afternoon. A small crowd gathered outside the house. The little grey huddle of people stood subdued and silent in the chill drizzle, and watched as two attendants carried out the stretcher on which Paul Suede’s body lay wrapped in a black shroud. Oak Street was uncommonly still and a haunting gloom hung over the whole proceeding.

Mama and the Meaning of Life

That night mama paid a visit to Mrs. Badgeley. Some time later, she told me about it. I filled in the details for myself, as I understood them.

It was almost ten o’clock. Christina had already changed into her flannel wrapper and was retiring when she answered mama’s rap on the door. Immediately mama entered the hall, the two women embraced.

“Oh, my dear Mrs. Badgeley! I know, my friend, you’ve had a bad time!”

“I was that sorry to miss your party, Mrs. Siegel, but I couldn’t bring myself to leave him!”

“Never mind about the party. You’d never forgive yourself if you’d left him.”

“I’d been expectin’ it, you know,” said Christina with a deep sigh, now leading mama down the hall. The dining room was in order, and Christina had closed the French doors between it and Paul Suede’s room.

As always, Mrs. Badgeley and mama treated each other with the utmost consideration.

“Here now, Mrs. Siegel, you give me your coat and scarf and sit down while I put the kettle on. We’ll have tea out here in the dining room.”

“Don’t put yourself to any trouble over me, Mrs. Badgeley. I’ll just go in the kitchen with you. You’ve had a hard day.”

Christina glanced at mama gratefully. “I’m going to miss him,” she said. Then, straightening, she tightened the wrapper about her middle and raised a roughened hand to poke at her hair. “But I’m all right and, of course, he’s much better off.”

Mama followed Christina into the kitchen where, within the circle of warmth of the stove, the two cats snuggled together in their wicker basket. At sight of mama, they stirred and then in leisurely fashion they emerged. One approached mama gingerly and rubbed his back against her leg, while the other, after a long disdainful look, turned haughtily away.

It was no surprise to mama that from upstairs the tap-tapping of Hans's typewriter could be heard.

"Would you perhaps prefer coffee tonight, Mrs. Siegel?" said Christina, placing the kettle on the stove. "I could just as easy boil this water up and perk you some."

"No, of course not. Go ahead and make tea. You make better tea than me, Mrs. Badgeley."

"And you make better coffee, Mrs. Siegel. I always enjoy your coffee."

"And I always enjoy your tea, Mrs. Badgeley. I find that your tea hits the spot."

"Well, in that case I'll make tea, and we'll have biscuits and some nice orange marmalade."

When at last they sat facing each other over the pot of tea, their conversation turned to Mrs. Badgeley's late boarder. "I was at his side, readin' to him from my Bible when he died," Christina said, her eyes soft and brown.

"I'm sure you were a great comfort to him, Mrs. Badgeley."

At these words, Christina blinked. "But I couldn't find anything in my Bible to comfort him, Mrs. Siegel."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"To comfort him for killing a man."

Mama covered her mouth with both hands. "Oh, I don't believe it!"

"It was in the war," Christina explained.

"Oh well, that's different."

"Not to him, it wasn't. He never forgave himself for it." Mama adopted a sombre attitude as Christina rose, refilled the teapot, then settled herself at the table again. "He did a lot of talking the last few days, did Mr. Suede. I couldn't make out everything, but I know he talked about things he never mentioned before. About his childhood and all. Did you know that the Judge was only two years older than him, Mrs. Siegel?"

"No, I never knew that, Mrs. Badgeley."

Christina took a deep breath. "Yes, he and his brother lost their father, and after that they were raised by their mother, with the help of an uncle on their father's side. They were well-to-do people and all, and the boys went to private schools. But poor Mr. Suede, he could never keep up with his brother. Roland was the honour student all along while little Paul, it was all he could do to scrape through. The teachers were forever scolding him and saying he should be more like his brother."

"So right away he got off to a bad start," said mama.

"That's right," Christina nodded. "But the real trouble began when he came into his inheritance on his twenty-first birthday. Ten thousand dollars it was, Mrs. Siegel!"

"Ten thousand dollars! Why, that's a fortune, Mrs. Badgeley."

Christina nodded. "His uncle was keeping it in trust for him, and now he was afraid to turn it over because he didn't trust Paul with it. Oh, they had a proper fight over it, never fear! The uncle insisted the money was for his education, and here Paul wanted to quit school. His mother was there in the room with them. Crying, she was, and his uncle was shouting. He called Paul a loafer and a dreamer and why wouldn't he make a lawyer out of himself like the other men in the family!"

"You have to feel sorry for the uncle," declared mama. "After all, he meant everything for his nephew's good!"

"That's right," said Christina. "But he wouldn't pay his uncle no heed. He'd got this bee in his bonnet about goin' around the world and searchin' for the meaning of life. And he wouldn't

listen to nobody! He just took that money and he sailed away. And do you know, Mrs. Siegel, he never saw his mother's face again."

"That poor woman, she didn't have it so good!" mama was moved to remark.

"That's a fact, Mrs. Siegel. Her boy goin' off half-cocked like that must have broke her poor heart!"

By this time they had finished their tea, and mama watched as Christina fidgeted with the crumbs on her plate. She shoved them around a bit and then flattened them with her fork.

"Did he ever find what he was looking for, Mrs. Badgeley?" asked mama.

"I don't rightly know, but I can tell you that he was a long time about it. He went from one country to another, like a person chasing a rainbow, you might say, until all his money was gone. It was a great pity because by the time he made up his mind to go home and settle down, the war broke out and that took four more years out of his life."

Finally Christina pushed her dish away. She squirmed about in her chair a little. Then, tightening the wrapper about herself again, she lifted her head and concentrated her gaze full upon mama. "What would you say it was, Mrs. Siegel?"

"What, Mrs. Badgeley?"

"The meaning of life."

"Oh, that!" replied mama. "You mean... I myself?"

"Yes, Mrs. Siegel, you yourself. What would you say it was?"

"Well, now that you've asked me, Mrs. Badgeley," mama reflected, "I would say that the meaning of life is... to live." And upon further consideration, she added, "Of course, you have to be a mensch too."

"A mensch?" Christina repeated the word.

"A mensch is a person who always does the best he can under the circumstances, Mrs. Badgeley."

"Oh, of course," said Christina. "But he gets on with it, you mean."

"Yes." And mama quickly amended, "But I believe in luck, too."

"That's the truth, you know," Christina agreed. "Poor Mr. Suede didn't have much luck. Not with his wife, anyway."

Mama looked surprised. "I never thought Mr. Suede was ever married."

"Oh, he was married." Christina now spoke through twisted lips. "But she wasn't up to much. She never loved him. And one day she upped and ran off with another man. If you asked me, I'd say that's when Mr. Suede realized that he'd wasted his whole life."

"And he couldn't face himself after that?" suggested mama. "And that's why he drank?"

Christina nodded. "Then later on a while his brother went and fetched him from heaven knows where he was, Some gutter or another. He brought him here to me and supported him for the rest of his life.

"I'm going to the funeral on Wednesday," Christina informed mama now. "The Judge was here today and he invited me himself."

"That was nice"

"He asked me to thank everybody for the wreath."

Mama nodded.

"And he said I was to keep the radio."

"You don't say! So now you own a radio, Mrs. Badgeley! Oh, I'm so happy for you!"

"You're to come in now, any time, and listen to it. And be sure you bring Mr. Siegel and Sophie with you."

"Don't worry. We'll be here with bells on," said mama.

Mama rose to leave and Christina accompanied her into the dining room where she helped her into her coat. From upstairs, they could still hear the insistent tapping of the typewriter.

"I notice my cousin is working late tonight, Mrs. Badgeley."

“Oh, he’ll go like that till well past midnight, Mrs. Siegel. He’s a serious lad; writing all the time.”

“I’d like him to selling something already, so it would encourage him.”

“Well, maybe he will soon. I know he’s fixin’ to send some articles about Germany to the Star Weekly. Poor Mr. Suede told him to do that. Your cousin talked with Mr. Suede a number of times, you know.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that, Mrs. Badgeley.”

“Yes, and today Hans was very nice to me. He came in and asked if there was anything he could do to help.”

“I’m so glad you like him, Mrs. Badgeley.”

“I do indeed. And I want you to know, having him here is a proper help to me.”

“I’m sure,” said mama, now wrapping her scarf about her head.

Christina’s eyes narrowed for a moment. “You know, Mrs. Siegel, I’ve noticed a change in your cousin in the last few days. If you asked me, I’d say he was coming out of his shell. This morning he even spoke to the Newhall girls at breakfast. They took him into their room after that and showed him their canary.”

“I know what you mean,” mama smiled. “He drops in to see us lately and he drinks a cup of coffee with Elia or me. And the other night he went for a walk with Sophie.”

They reached the door and Christina stood with her hand on the knob. “I suppose you’ll be off on your trip any day now, Mrs. Siegel.”

“Yes, I will. As soon as the weather warms up a little,” said mama, looking pensive now. “But it looks like the deal is off about the suit.”

“Mr. Siegel wouldn’t let you have the money?”

“No. Actually it wasn’t him, Mrs. Harris changed her mind.”

“But she distinctly promised you that suit!” cried Christina.

Mama frowned. “She broke her promise to me. And into the bargain I think I lost her as a customer.”

“Don’t say that, Mrs. Siegel!”

“She hasn’t been near the store since the party.” Mama shrugged. “But what could you do? I’ll say good night now, Mrs. Badgeley.”

“All right, Mrs. Siegel. Thanks ever so for dropping in. It did me good getting all that off my chest.”

“You know I always enjoy talking with you, Mrs. Badgeley.”

“And I can truthfully return the compliment, Mrs. Siegel.” Christina held the door open for mama. “Now mind you don’t fall going down the steps.”

“And you better get inside. You don’t want to catching a cold.”

“You’ll be careful now, won’t you?” Christina called after mama, as she started down the darkened street.

“I will,” replied mama, glancing back. “Now don’t you worry about me, Mrs. Badgeley.”

Spring Comes to Cabbagetown

The weather was finally breaking, and none too soon. Winter had at long last run its course, and mild April had come again to Cabbagetown. A month ago it might not have seemed possible, but little green needles of grass were pushing their way through brown patches of ground, so recently vacated by slush and snow. Early one morning, I had been awakened by a robin serenading me from the ledge outside my bedroom window. And in every house, the sun was streaming through windows abundantly, warming everyone.

Out of doors the sharpness had gone from the wind and was being replaced by a mellow warmth. Sniffing spring in the air, people were turning their eyes upward to gaze into a sky of pure blue. Men, women and children were shedding rubbers and galoshes; and in his shoemaker's shop, Mr. Johannsen was enjoying an increase in the volume of his business. He could look forward to taking his family off relief any day now.

This fact had already been accomplished at 268 Sumach Street. Orville Maloney was back at his job as wheelsman on a tug down at the Harbour, where he would be employed now right smack into next November. Orville and his wife Maude would have no further need of the pogy until then. Next door, Joe Wiggins was home again. At least temporarily. Joe had been released from jail the previous week.

The twin oaks in front of the whitewashed cottage at the corner of Sumach and Oak Streets were already showing promise of the picturesque greenery that they would soon bestow upon the street. And the cottage itself, vacated a few weeks ago by the Campbell family, was occupied again. This time by an Italian family by

the name of Penachi. In them mama and papa had gained a new customer. But they had lost a good cash one in Harriet Harris, who now preferred to do her shopping elsewhere.

Mama had heard from Lloyd Campbell a few days before. Lloyd wrote that the family had made the trip out west in comfort, and that his father was overjoyed to see them. He went on to say that Irene and the children were eating well and drinking lots of milk on the farm, and that they looked better to him already. Lloyd also promised to let mama know when the new baby arrived, and mentioned that he hoped soon to send her something towards his bill.

That morning, I remember, life was proceeding as usual. Mama was wearing her brown and green flowered house-dress that Mrs. Badgeley had ironed the night before. She was stationed in her usual spot behind the counter, and papa was busy at the vegetable counter. Mama was feeling light-hearted. She was happily aware of the sun shining through the window. Besides, I had told her about the robin.

"Bye, mama. Bye, papa," I called over my shoulder as, carrying my heavy stack of books, I hurried through the store. "Oh mama, I meant to tell you. I'm getting along just fine in Chemistry now. My teacher said that I shouldn't have any trouble passing the Departmental."

At this information, mama's only rejoinder was the single word: "Aha!"

"I'm not even worried about it any more," I went on. "I sort of like it."

Mama nodded her head a few times. "So what have you learned from this, Sophie?"

"Oh, a lot about Chemistry." I was about to leave, but mama stopped me.

"Wait a minute, Sophie! And about life, what have you learned?"

"About life?"

“About life.”

I had to think a minute. ”Not to give up easily? To try?”

This time it must have been the right answer, for mama smiled and waved me on with the command: “*Weiter!*”

Which can be translated, roughly, as ‘Onward!’

And so when I left for school on that memorable day, everything at home was normal. But not when I returned! Far from it. When I walked into the store that afternoon, the very air was bristling with excitement. Mama and papa were in a high state of animation, full of chatter and laughing a lot.

“What happened?” Before I knew it, I was laughing too.

“Oh Sophie, wait till I tell you!”

“No, let me tell her, Rachel!” papa demanded.

Unable to contain themselves, mama and papa both attempted to speak; they interrupted each other, then they spoke at once. But as the story came tumbling from their lips, I could easily enough picture the events of their morning.

By nine-thirty George had left. And Freddie. Mr. McGillivray also. Mrs. Ottochuck and Mrs. Romaniuk had already been in, served, and out. Today they had brought along Mrs. Ottochuck’s cousin Mrs. Safka, whose relief order papa had filled.

“Ding-a-ling-a-ling,” rang the bell, and in came a piqued-faced old woman. She shuffled in, half-carrying, half dragging a battered cardboard suitcase. And lifting it to the counter laboriously, she opened the latch of it. Then she stood there, silently rubbing her old hands together.

At sight of the suitcase, I know that papa’s heart sank. Such suitcases were familiar to him. As were their contents. Besides, papa had a theory to the effect that all owners of battered cardboard suitcases of this particular vintage belonged to a secret union, and that the name “Siegel’s Groceteria,” with the address, was posted prominently on their bulletin board. For how else would so many of them have found their way to his establishment?

But so far as mama was concerned, here was her opportunity to do a mitzvah. And sure enough, there she was with her commiseration all too evident on her face, approaching the old woman and surveying the wares in the suitcase. Which consisted of a meagre assortment of pins, needles, garters, tape measures and other superfluous trifles. The old woman had only to look up at mama, and before she could even open her mouth to speak, mama had already answered her. “Naturally, I’ll buy something,” she said, picking out a package of needles, a few safety pins and a thimble. Then punching the ‘No Sale’ key on the cash register, she withdrew 25¢ and placed it in the palm of the old woman’s hand. “I realize this is not a large order,” mama apologized, “but it’s better than nothing.”

From his position at the vegetable counter, papa watched with interest. He noted that, so far, the old woman had not so much as uttered a single word. She simply stood and nodded to mama in mute agreement, while her withered lips formed the semblance of a smile.

As mama touched it, the skin of the old woman’s hand felt cold and thin as parchment. “My, but your hand is cold, mother!” mama exclaimed. “I’ll tell you what you should do. You see those stairs at the back of the store? Well, you go up them, carefully so you shouldn’t fall, into my kitchen. It’s nice and warm in there, and on my stove you’ll find a pot of hot coffee. You help yourself. Just take your time and look around. You’ll find everything you need in the big china cabinet.

The old woman looked about uncertainly. Then she gingerly ambled through the unfamiliar surroundings, up the stairs and into mama’s kitchen. Two cups of coffee and three slices of rye bread and sweet butter later, she shuffled back down the stairs and through the store once more. Indeed, she was feeling better now and picking up her suitcase, she slowly approached the door where she turned her wrinkled face gratefully to papa.

“You’re welcome, you’re welcome,” said papa as he opened the door, impatient to see the last of her.

A few minutes later; papa had one of his tussles with the telephone operator. For upon examining the bunch of bananas that hung from the ceiling on its steel hook, he made the discovery that the bananas were running low. “Rachel,” he remarked, “was Tony here to check up on the bananas?”

Mama was busy at the scale, packaging white beans into bags from a large sack beside her. She stopped what she was doing and thought for a moment. Then glancing at papa, she replied, “Elia, now that I think about it, I don’t remember seeing Tony here this week.”

“In that case, we’ll have to phone him,” papa stated.

“Maybe he’s sick,” volunteered mama.

“Well, we’ll soon find out,” said papa. “Where is that paper he gave you, with his phone number on it?”

The paper! Mama thought frantically. Now, let’s see, where was the paper? Where was the paper with Tony Populopulous’s phone number on it? Where indeed? Mama remembered only that she had hidden it in a very good place. And where was that good place? Unfortunately mama could not say.

“It would be better if you didn’t hide in such good places,” observed papa sarcastically. “Then maybe we could find things around here sometimes.”

Mama searched for the piece of paper high and low. In every nook and cranny of the counter, in every dresser, apron pocket and sweater coat. But it was no use. It was gone. Disappeared!

When it finally became clear to papa that the paper was not to be found, he placed his lips together fatalistically and steeled himself for the ordeal ahead. For once more he must enjoin the services of his arch adversary, that telephone operator known as Information.

“Elia,” mama cautioned him, “I’m sorry I lost the paper, but I’m telling you. Don’t start up! Wait till Sophie comes home from school. She will find the number for you, and that way there will be no trouble!”

But papa refused to listen to reason. He pointed out that I would not be home until much later, and in the meantime it was entirely possible that he might lose a sale or two in bananas. Besides, he was impatient to learn the reason for Tony’s neglect of him. No, there was nothing for it, papa decided, but to ring up Information and request the telephone number from her.

The telephone operator did not begin to comprehend what the quarrelsome customer was fussing and fuming about. She could probably not make head nor tail of the name he was garbling; nor was it likely that she had a clue as to what prompted the soliloquy about long-suffering tax-payers and government employees who took their money without giving service in return. No doubt she felt that she was being denounced for no good reason. And she spoke politely, in the iciest of tones.

It was at this point that mama, noting that the colour of papa’s face had advanced from white to pink to red, decided to intervene. And taking the receiver from him, she nodded reassuringly, to let him know that the matter was now in efficient hands. Then she spoke into the mouthpiece herself, “My dear Information,” she began with utmost tact, “please do not be sore at my husband. You see, he doesn’t really mean nothing. It’s just that he’s nervous and he does not speak English so good. I speak it better than him.”

“Oh?” said the operator, her tone warming somewhat to this fragment of reason. “Then would you please tell me, madam, what exactly it is that you people want of me.”

“All we want,” mama explained very patiently, “is to ask a simple favour of you, Information. Would you kindly send us our banana man?”

A Suit and a Trip for Grandmother

The Misses Victoria and Alicia Newhall now fluttered in. They lurked near the vegetable counter and gazed longingly at the fruit and vegetables. "My, what lovely tomatoes!" remarked Alicia.

"Could I help you with some, Miss Newhall?" asked papa.

"How much are you asking for them, Mr. Siegel?"

"They're hothouse," papa replied. "Twenty-nine cents a pound."

"Oh! Well no, no thank you," said Alicia as she and Victoria simultaneously backed away from the counter, "it's not... it's not..."

"It's not an emergency," said Victoria, finishing her sister's sentence for her. The sisters next perused the cakes in the tray on the counter.

"Can I help you ladies now?" said papa.

Victoria turned to her sister questioningly, and Alicia nodded. Then from her handbag Victoria extracted a sheet of paper, on which was recorded, clown to the finest detail, the sisters' housekeeping minutiae. "We have our little list, Mr. Siegel," she assured papa, who was by now struggling to keep his short temper under control. "We need some sugar for our tea. Half a pound, please; three buns, one and a half for Alicia and one and a half for me. You see, one is not quite enough for each of us, and two is too much."

"Anything else?" asked papa staunchly.

Turning to her sister with an air of derring-do, Victoria suggested, "Let's choose our pastry now, Alicia. Would you like a butter tart, or would you prefer one of these nice raisin squares?"

"Oh *dearie* me," said Victoria, "it's so hard to decide. Have you noticed the cream puffs, Alicia? They look delightful! Yes, that's what I think I'll do. I'll choose a cream puff. One cream puff and one butter tart, Mr. Siegel."

Then it happened.

Just as papa picked out the two small cakes and prepared to place them into a little bag, the bell rang. And Mrs. Badgeley, clutching one cat and with one trailing behind, raced into the store. There was a touch of madness about her appearance. Her eyes were wild; her hair completely dishevelled, and she was frantically waiving her right arm above her head. "Mrs. Siegel!" she shrieked, "Mrs. Siegel!"

As by a signal, Victoria and Alicia glanced at each other; papa stopped dead in his tracks. And mama tried to help. Running around the counter, mama grasped Mrs. Badgeley firmly by both arms and made an attempt to steady her. "Oh, my dear!" mama cried. "What's wrong?"

"Here! Take it! Take it!" shouted Christina, and she stuffed something into mama's hand.

Mama looked down at her hand and was astounded to see two bills in it. Two one-hundred-dollar bills! "Why," she exclaimed, "this is two hundred dollars!" Then very quietly, she added, "Mrs. Badgeley, where did you get so much money?"

"From Mr. Suede!" howled Christina.

Then she breathlessly recounted the events of her morning. A short while ago, she said, a man had knocked at her front door, and upon answering it, Christina had come face to face with a young stranger, a thin young chap, very polite and all. "The young man carried a briefcase.

"Mrs. Christina Badgeley?" he inquired.

"I am Christina Badgeley. Can I do anything for you?"

"I wish to speak with you, Mrs. Badgeley."

"In that case, would you care to come inside?"

She ushered him into her dining room and he placed his coat and hat 'all careful like' on the chair, and sat himself down. Then opening the briefcase, he extracted some papers from it. "I have a cheque here for you, Mrs. Badgeley," he said then, searching for a moment among his papers, "and if you will just sign this form, I shall release it to you."

"Oh, there must be some mistake!" Christina cried. "You can't mean me! Because I don't get any cheques from nobody any more. I used to get one on the first of every month when my boarder Mr. Suede was alive, but..."

The young man interrupted. "Mrs. Badgeley, this cheque is in connection with the late Paul Suede. If you will just let me explain. You see, I represent the Prudential Assurance Company of London, England. The late deceased had a policy with us. Quite an old policy, as a matter of fact. Paid up several years ago. According to our records, if you are Christina Badgeley of 128 Oak Street, Toronto, Ontario, you are the beneficiary."

Christina now interrupted her tale long enough to look directly into mama's eyes. "Do you know what beneficiary means, Mrs. Siegel?" she asked.

"Yes!" mama replied quickly.

"What?" asked papa. "What does it mean?"

"I don't know!" said mama.

The little group in the store gathered around Christina and listened with bated breath, as in a loud clear voice papa inquired, "Mrs. Badgeley, how much was the cheque for?"

"A thousand dollars!" Christina answered.

"A thousand dollars!" They all repeated it.

And now mama could contain herself no longer. "Oh, Mrs. Badgeley!" she cried. "Oh, my dear Mrs. Badgeley!" Falling into each other's arms, they tearfully embraced. Then Christina regained control over herself and although still excited, she related the balance of the morning's happenings with relative composure.

"Do you mean to tell me that this little piece of paper is worth a thousand dollars?" she asked the young man, after he had handed her the cheque.

"That's right, Mrs. Badgeley."

But she didn't really believe him. Suddenly thinking of the automobile parked in front of her house, she asked him if he would mind driving her down to the Toronto-Dominion Bank at Queen and Parliament Streets.

Evidently the representative of the Prudential Assurance Company had no objection, for as Christina pointed out, he was a 'very nice sort of a young chap.' Once in the bank where she was known, Christina approached the teller, looked him straight in the eye and said, "I'd like this cashed, please."

To her surprise, the teller's only rejoinder was, "How would you like it, Mrs. Badgeley?"

"In hundreds," said Christina nonchalantly.

"Why did you say that, Mrs. Badgeley?" mama wanted to know.

"Just for the fun of it, Mrs. Siegel," replied Christina with a twinkle in her eyes. "I never seen a hundred-dollar bill before. Of course, once he gave them to me, I put eight of them right back in that old account I used to have with Will."

"Naturally," said mama. And the others—papa and the Misses Newhall—nodded in commendation of Christina's good sense. Alicia and Victoria exchanged meaningful glances. Their landlady was now a rich woman. Papa said nothing at all. He broke out into an almost unprecedented broad smile. Mrs. Badgeley had paid her bill!

The next week passed quickly. And now, wearing mama's apron over my uniform, I was standing behind the counter in mama's place near the Heinz 57 sign. Papa was at the front of the

store, pacing up and down and looking nervously out the window. When mama made her entrance, she walked in triumph, for this afternoon she was wearing her new suit.

Her selection was a dressy blue wool with a flattering collar of azure silver fox. Mama said that the sales lady at Baton's had referred to it as definitely chic; had even ventured the opinion that it was the most beautiful suit on the floor. The sales lady had not found her customer unprepared for the try-on. Indeed, for mama came to her straight from the corsetry department on the second floor. Later, mama thanked the sales lady profusely and with her suit box under her arm, she proceeded to the hat department.

On her head, mama now wore cockily, albeit a little precariously, a navy straw hat. It was bedecked with such colourful flowers that had they been put to the test, they would have rivalled nature herself. Under this masterful creation, mama's eyes danced.

Nor had she overlooked accessories. Over her left arm there dangled a fine navy purse and in her right hand she held a pair of stiff kid gloves. If one had chanced to glance downwards at mama's feet, he would have been treated to a glimpse of the latest in 1935 shoe styles... a smooth navy kid pump with deep pirate buckles.

Mama had even considered having a finger-wave, but there papa had drawn the line. "It wouldn't be you!" he had insisted.

I drank in the details of her attire and, spell-bound, I cried, "Oh mama, you have an 'ensemble'! Just wait till Annie sees you!"

As papa caught sight of her, he stopped short and simply stared. I think that for the moment she had quite taken his breath away. Then regaining himself, papa said, "It is lovely on you, Rachel. A beautiful suit!"

Her retort came quickly. "With my shape, a suit!" But there was no mistaking the excitement in her eyes.

I suppose that papa couldn't help it. Fumbling now in his trouser pocket, he withdrew his handkerchief, a large polka dot affair with a red border, and noisily he blew his nose. At the same time I noticed, he wiped a tear or two from his eyes.

What was papa thinking then, I wondered. Was he thinking how handsome mama still was, how vivacious her eyes and how bright her smile? And that only she, only his wife, would have the audacity to sit such a hat atop such a head of hair? Was he thinking too that there was a lot of silver in it now? All at once were papa's thoughts spinning back, back over the years? Was he twenty-three again, standing outside Gold's Tailoring Shop, while mama was inside, cancelling the suit she had ordered for their honeymoon trip? Because her sister had decided, precisely then, to come to Canada?

As he gazed at mama in the beautiful new suit, was papa remembering the days, the weeks, the months and years in the factories? And the long evenings he sat alone with their infant, sat morosely with his solitary pint of beer, while mama was out peddling from door to door? Or even of the piece-work from the factories she did at home? Always with the hope of eventually bringing over her brother? Her brother who died of consumption within a year of his arrival in Canada. With mellowness, was papa reminiscing now over the wonder and joy that were his, when he held their firstborn in his arms? A lovely daughter whom they named Annie after mama's own mother. And then happily once more over the birth of their second daughter, myself;

Later had come the hardships of starting a business together on very little capital. With the debts, the bills, the mistakes, the bad buys and the work. So much work. In the store, in the kitchen. The sewing, and with the sewing, always the singing. So much singing, so much sewing. So much cooking. So much work.

As I watched him, papa's lips twisted downwards. Was he reflecting upon the gulf that separated him and mama? Upon the unending arguments over money? Was he considering mama's

stubbornness that he found so trying, and her tava that he envied so? Then in a flash did the impression present itself to papa of something else? Of something that was never far away, but was always lurking in the back of his mind. Undoubtedly to be imprinted there until the end of papa's days? It was the image that he carried about with him of her abundant, lustrous, blue-black hair as it looked when it fell over her shoulders and arms, at the moment when she unloosed it. Every night for the last twenty-five years.

Stuffing the red handkerchief back in his pocket, inelegantly, so that a good part of it still showed, papa approached her now and laboriously, for it came hard to him to put tenderness into words, he began to speak. "Rachel... happiness... happiness..."

He paused, but mama found his hand and held it. "It's all right, Elia. I understand."

Papa moistened his lips. "No, just a minute! I need to tell you something. I'm going to be lonesome... because... because wherever you are, Rachel, the world is warm by me."

Nodding her head several times, mama replied softly. "I love you too." He leaned over then and kissed her on the cheek—an awkward, husbandly sort of kiss.

I joined them, and mama drew me close, hugged me hard and kissed me. "Now you two, take good care of each other, while I'm away!" she warned.

"And you enjoy yourself!" papa admonished her.

"And don't forget to kiss the baby for me!" I added.

Presently a taxi drew up in front of the store. And running to the window, I shouted: "It's here! The taxi's here!"

"What I don't understand," papa remarked, now sounding more like himself again, "is why you had to order a whole taxi."

"Because," said mama "Today Mrs. Siegel is going first class. All the way. Just like a sport."

The taxi driver entered. He was a greying, heavy set man in his late thirties, wearing a dark windbreaker and a cap. "You called for a cab, Mr. Siegel?" he asked. He was obviously puzzled.

"Yes, for my wife," said papa. "She's going to the railway station to catch that afternoon train that goes up north."

The taxi driver was acquainted with us. He and his family resided half a block clown from the store, on Taylor Street. His wife was not a regular customer, but he himself sometimes came in for a package of cigarettes or a soft drink. As he caught sight of mama, his eyes opened wide, "Holy smoke! Is that you, Mrs. Siegel?" he exclaimed.

"That's me, sonny! You're not seein' things."

"You look like a million bucks, Mrs. Siegel! Have you got any luggage?"

"That's it on the top of the steps." Mama stood poised, aware of the dashing figure she was cutting.

The driver walked through the store to the back, where he stopped and looked about. Then he spotted the luggage, two white paper shopping bags with BATON'S outlined on them in huge red lettering.

Outside of a few items of personal clothing, the bags were filled with food. A chicken already roasted, a carp already baked, a macaroni pudding, strudel, poppy-seed cookies, a dozen bagels, and a *pumpernick*. And lying sideways on the top of the first bag, a black and white teddy bear.

Picking up the two bags, the driver grinned. "Ready to go, Mrs. Siegel?"

Smiling up at him engagingly and taking him by the forearm, mama ushered the driver through the store, and out the door that papa held open for them. I rushed to the window and papa joined me. We watched together as the driver opened the back door of the cab and mama entered it. Once she was settled in the back seat, mama kissed her hand and waved to us. A moment later the cab drove off and she was gone.

Papa and I turned from the window. The place behind the counter usually occupied by mama seemed filled now by a vast emptiness. We two were quite alone. I felt a little self-conscious, and I knew that papa did also, for he frowned and, uncertain what to do next, he rubbed his chin. Then he took his watch from his vest pocket, snapped it open and stood thoughtfully regarding the old photograph.

The funny thing about papa, I thought, is that he's so impatient, and yet he never gets tired of looking at that photograph. As I watched him now, I was aware of the crooked little smile playing around his lips. "Your mother is a lovely woman, Sophie," papa remarked. Then he looked straight at me. "She was the most beautiful young woman I ever saw in my life. When I was a young man, she always reminded me of a young gypsy."

What a ridiculous idea, I thought. Somehow I had never thought of mama as being beautiful. Nor, for that matter, even as being a woman. She was always just mama to me. And to everybody else? Well... Mrs. Siegel.

My eyes sought papa's.

"That's right, Sophie," he repeated. "She was the most beautiful young woman I ever saw in my life."

Gosh! I thought. Papa was acting queer this morning. So mellow and sentimental. And why did he keep saying 'young'? What could that word possibly have to do with papa? Then all at once, the realization came to me that if mama was a woman, then papa was a man. And what was more, they had both once been young. A young man and a young woman. And... in love? I had never before thought of mama and papa in that light.

"Papa," I said, "let me see that picture! The one with all the hair!"

Papa handed me his watch and I found myself lingering over the old photograph for quite a long while. It was distinctly surprising, but it happened to me too. Beneath my fingers the picture seemed to come alive. It was mama in the full flush of her

youth. The eager young face, framed richly with the thick black hair; the earnest dark eyes, full of trust; the sweet smile. And something in addition. Mama's mettle. Her quality shining through, like a kind of inner glow.

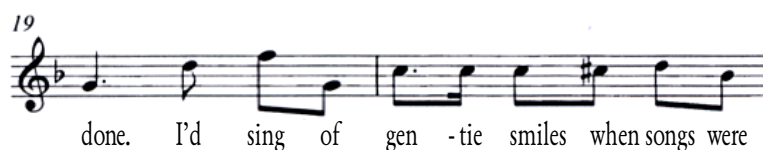
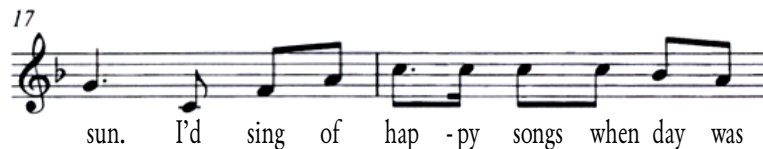
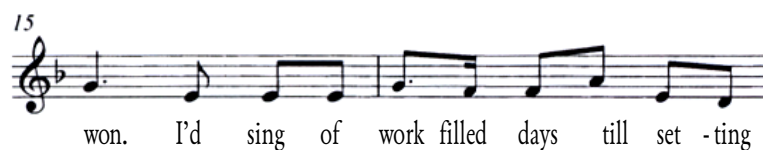
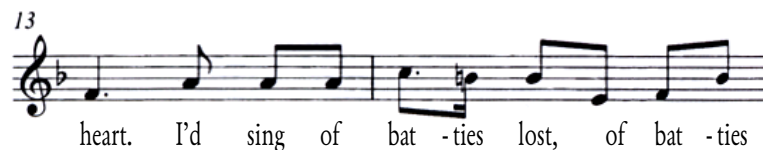
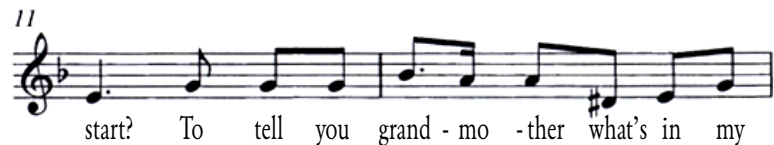
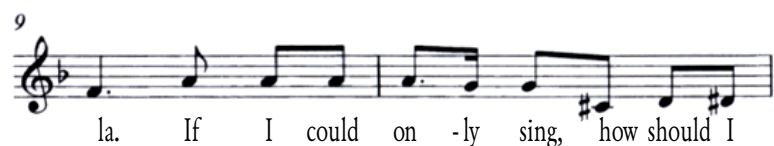
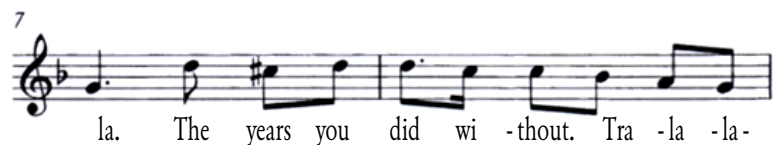
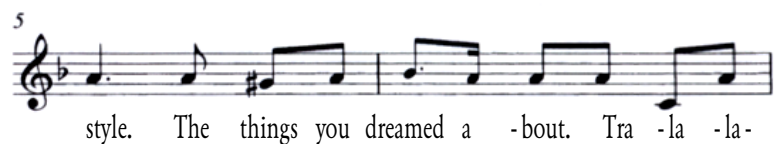
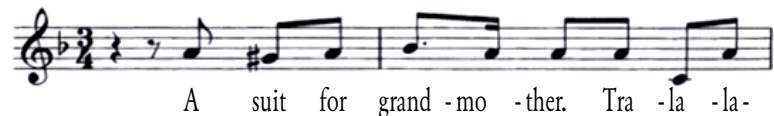
"Papa," I said when I found my voice, "I think I see what you mean. I guess she was sort of beautiful... if you like that type."

Suddenly I was conscious of a strange feeling stirring in my heart. It would have been hard to explain it, I thought. It was a quivering sort of feeling and, yet too, a feeling of fullness. In that moment I knew that I was no longer a child. Understanding had come to me, and I felt older, more grown up. Almost like a woman myself.

"A Suit For Grandmother"

(based on a Viennese melody)

Sophie Stransman



Glossary

Aufmachen	(German) open up
Chaul Hamoed	the weekdays of the eight-day holidays of Sukkoh (the harvest holiday)
Choson	bridegroom
Chutzpah	nerve or gall carried to the extreme
Die Greena Cousina	the greenhorn cousin
Die Kliene	the clean one
Die Komishka	the comedienne
Die Roite	the redhead
Der Professor	the professor
Dzien dobry	(Polish) Good morning / Good afternoon
Flaishik	pertaining to meat; meat dishes
Gevalt	help
Hack mir nicht kein chainak	lit. don't bang me a kettle; coll. don't bother me
Hamantaschen	triangular fruit- or poppy-seed filled pastries
Heurigen	(Viennese) wine
Hickidicker	one who stutters
Ich Bin ein Boarder bei mein Weib	I'm a Boarder at my Wife's house
Jakela	little Jack
Katz	cat

Kein-einhorah	no evil eye
Kishka	stuffed derma
Knishes	a potato batter, filled and baked
Kosher	food prepared according to Jewish ritual law
Kreplach	wonton; ravioli
L'chaim	to life (a toast)
Malochamovis	The Angel of Death
Mammela	lit. little mother; coll: an endearment
Mammenu	See Mammela
Maynseh	a drawn-out story; a tall tale
Mazel	good luck
Mazeltov	congratulations
Meema	aunt
Megillah	<i>the story of Purim as recorded on a special scroll</i>
Mentsch	a responsible person, a good person
Milchik	dairy; pertaining to dairy foods
Mirtchem	<i>(Hebrew) If God wills it</i>
Mishigahis	a flash of madness
Misepochah	one's family, including every known relative
Mit leiten gleich	respectable
Naches	joy
Narishkaten	nonsense
Nebech	alas
Noo	so there
Oy	an expression denoting pain or surprise

Oy gevalt	Oh my goodness!
Pani / (m.) Pan	(Polish) Miss, Mrs. (Masculine:) Mister, Sir
Papirosen	(Russian) cigarettes
Parnoosah	worldly goods
Paskudnack	blackguard
Pesach	The Passover
Phumphing	speaking in a garbled manner, mumbling
Pidyan Haben	Ceremony symbolizing the redemption of the first-born son
Pogey	(slang) government relief
Pumpernick	a round, dark loaf of bread
Rebbe	Rabbi
Rozinkas mit mandlen	raisins and almonds
Scaldonish	(contrived) a to-do over scalding
Schnapps	whisky
Schnorrer	lit. a beggar; coll. a miser or cheapskate
Schnorring	begging, penny-pinching
Shabbos	The Sabbath; Friday at sundown until Saturday at sundown
Shah	hush
Shikkur	drunkard
Shlimazel	a born loser (from the German 'schlim'—bad; 'mazel'—luck)
Shmatah	a rag
Shochet	a slaughterer of fowl and animals, according to the laws of Kashrut (traditional Jewish requirements)

Simchah	celebration; rejoicing
Strudel	a flaky dough filled with fruit, nuts and jam, rolled and baked
Tacka	really
Talmud	a Jewish classic, containing teachings on religion, ethics, folklore and law
Tante	aunt
Tava	habit, manner
't'osta	You have it (abb. Of ot hosta')
traif	not kosher
tzimmes	a sweet carrot stew; (fig) a fuss
tzores	trouble
weiter	further, farther
welt	world
wiener schnitzel	lit. Viennese cut; veal cutlet
zmenia	a'smidgin'; a portion
Yossel,	Joseph